CAVANAGH
Forest Ranger

HAMLIN GARLAND

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THE RANGER

CAVANAGH
FOREST RANGER

A ROMANCE
OF THE MOUNTAIN WEST

BY
HAMLIN GARLAND
AUTHOR OF
"THE CAPTAIN OF THE GRAY-HORSE TROOP"
"MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS" ETC.

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BOOKS BY

HAMLIN GARLAND

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TO THE FOREST RANGER

WHOSE LONELY VIGIL ON
THE HEIGHTS SAFEGUARDS
THE PUBLIC HERITAGE

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Mr. Garland:—You have been kind enough to let me see the proofs of *Cavanagh: Forest Ranger*. I have read it with mingled feelings—with keen appreciation of your sympathetic understanding of the problems which confronted the Forest Service before the Western people understood it, and with deep regret that I am no longer officially associated with its work (although I am as deeply interested, and almost as closely in touch as ever).

The Western frontier, to the lasting sorrow of all old hunters like yourself, has now practically disappeared. Its people faced life with a manly dependence on their own courage and capacity which did them, and still does them, high honor. Some of them were naturally slow to see the advantages of the new order. But now that they have seen it, there is nowhere more intelligent, convinced, and effective support of the Conservation policies than in the West. The establishment of the new order in some places was not child's play. But there is a strain of fairness among the Western people which you can always count on in such a fight as the Forest Service has made and won.

The Service contains the best body of young men I

know, and many splendid veterans. It is nine-tenths made up of Western men. It has met the West on its own ground, and it has won the contest—an episode of which you have so well described—because the West believes in what it stands for.

I have lived much among the Western mountain men. I have studied their problems; differed with some of them, and worked with many of them. Sometimes I have lost and sometimes I have won, but every time the fight was worth while. I have come out of it all with a respect and liking for the West which will last as long as I do.

Very sincerely yours,

GIFFORD PINCHOT.

March 14, 1910.

Cavanagh: Forest Ranger

Cavanagh: Forest Ranger

I

THE DESERT CHARIOT

Lee Virginia Wetherford began her return journey into the mountain West with exultation. From the moment she opened her car-window that August morning in Nebraska the plain called to her, sustained her illusions. It was all quite as big, as tawny, as she remembered it—fit arena for the epic deeds in which her father had been a leader bold and free.

Her memories of Roaring Fork and its people were childish and romantic. She recalled, vividly, the stage-coach which used to amble sedately, not to say wheezily, from the railway to the Fork and from the Fork back to the railway, in the days when she had ridden away in it a tearful, despairing, long-limbed girl, and fully expected to find it waiting for her at Sulphur City, with old Tom Quentan still as its driver.

The years of absence had been years of growth, and though she had changed from child to woman in these suns and moons, she could not think of the Fork as anything other than the romantic town she had left—a list

wherein spurred and steel-girt cow-men strode lamely over uneven sidewalks, or swooped, like the red nomads of the desert, in mad troops through the starlit night.

The first hint of "the new West" came to her by way of the pretentious Hotel Alma, which stood opposite the station at Sulphur, and to which she was led by a colored porter of most elaborate and kindly manners.

This house, which furnished an excellent dinner and an absorbing mixture of types both American and European, was vaguely disturbing to her. It was plainly not of the old-time West—the West her father had dominated in the days "before the invasion." It was, indeed, distinctly built for the tourist trade, and was filled with all that might indicate the comfortable nearness of big game and good fishing.

Upon inquiry as to the stage, she was amazed to hear that an automobile now made the journey to the Fork in five hours, and that it left immediately after the midday meal.

This was still more disconcerting than the hotel, but the closer she came to the ride, the more resigned she became, for she began to relive the long hours of torture on the trip outward, during which she had endured clouds of dust and blazing heat. There were some disadvantages in the old stage, romantic as her conception of it had been. Furthermore, the coach had gone; so she made application for her seat at once.

At two o'clock, as the car came to the door, she entered it with a sense of having stepped from one invading chariot of progress to another, so big and shining and

up to date was its glittering body, shining with brass and glowing with brave red paint. It was driven, also, by a small, lean young fellow, whom the cowboys on her father's ranch would have called a "lunger," so thin and small were his hands and arms. He was quite as far from old Tom Quentan as the car was from the coach on which he used to perch.

The owner of the machine, perceiving under Virginia's veil a girl's pretty face, motioned her to the seat with the driver, and rode beside her for a few minutes (standing on the foot-board), to inquire if she were visiting friends in the Fork.

"Yes," she replied, curtly, "I am."

Something in her tone discouraged him from further inquiry, and he soon dropped away.

The seats were apparently quite filled with men, when at the last moment a middle-aged woman, with a penetrating, nasal, drawling utterance, inquired if she were expected to be "squoze in betwixt them two strange men on that there back seat."

Lee Virginia turned, and was about to greet the woman as an old acquaintance when something bold and vulgar in the complaining vixen's face checked the impulse.

The stage-agent called her "Miss McBride," and with exaggerated courtesy explained that travel was heavy, and that he had not known that she was intending to go.

One of the men, a slender young fellow, moved to the middle of the seat, and politely said, "You can sit on the outside, madam."

She clambered in with doleful clamor. "Well, I never rode in one of these pesky things before, and if you git me safe down to the Fork I'll promise never to jump the brute another time."

A chuckle went 'round the car; but it soon died out, for the new-comer scarcely left off talking for the next three hours, and Virginia was very glad she had not claimed acquaintanceship.

As they whirled madly down the valley the girl was astonished at the transformation in the hot, dry land. Wire fences ran here and there, enclosing fields of alfalfa and wheat where once only the sage-brush and the greasewood grew. Painted farm-houses shone on the banks of the creeks, and irrigating ditches flashed across the road with an air of business and decision.

For the first half-hour it seemed as if the dominion of the cattle-man had ended, but as the swift car drew away from the valley of the Bear and climbed the divide toward the north, the free range was disclosed, with few changes, save in the cattle, which were all of the harmless or hornless variety, appearing tame and spiritless in comparison with the old-time half-wild broad-horn breeds.

No horsemen were abroad, and nothing was heard but the whirr of the motor and the steady flow of the garrulous woman behind. Not till the machine was descending the long divide to the west did a single cowboy come into view to remind the girl of the heroic past, and this one but a symbol—a figure of speech. Leaning forward upon his reeling, foaming steed, he spurred along the

road as if pursued, casting backward apprehensive glances, as if in the brassy eyes of the car he read his doom—the doom of all his kind.

Some vague perception of this symbolism came into Virginia's thought as she watched the swift and tireless wheels swallow the shortening distance between the heels of the flying pony and the gilded seat in which she sat. Vain was the attempt to outride progress. The rider pulled out, and as they passed him the girl found still greater significance in the fact that he was one of her father's old-time cowboys—a grizzled, middle-aged, light-weight centaur whom she would not have recognized had not the driver called him by his quaint well-known nickname.

Soon afterward the motor overhauled and passed the battered stage lumbering along, bereft of its passengers, sunk to the level of carrying the baggage for its contemptuous aristocratic supplanter; and as Lee Virginia looked up at the driver, she caught the glance of a simple-minded farm-boy looking down at her. Tom Quentan no longer guided the plunging, reeling broncos on their swift and perilous way—he had sturdily declined to "play second fiddle to a kerosene tank."

Lee began to wonder if she should find the Fork much changed—her mother was a bad correspondent.

Her unspoken question, opportunely asked by another, was answered by Mrs. McBride. "Oh, Lord, yes! Summer tourists are crawlin' all over us sence this otto line began. 'Pears like all the bare-armed boobies and cross-legged little rips in Omaha and Denver has jest got to

ride in and look us over. Two of them new hotels in Sulphur don't do a thing but feed these tenderfeet. I s'pose pro-hi-bition will be the next grandstand-play on the part of our town-lot boomers. We old cow-punchers don't care whether the town grows or not, but these hyer bankers and truck-farmers are all for raisin' the price o' land and taxin' us quiet fellers out of our boots."

Virginia winced a little at this, for it flashed over her that all the women with whom she had grown up spoke very much in this fashion—using breeding terms almost as freely as the ranchers themselves. It was natural enough. What else could they do in talking to men who knew nothing but cows? And yet it was no longer wholly excusable even to the men, who laughed openly in reply.

The mountains, too, yielded their disappointment. For the first hour or two they seemed lower and less mysterious than of old. They neither wooed nor threatened—only the plain remained as vast and as majestic as ever. The fences, the occasional farms in the valleys could not subdue its outspread, serene majesty to prettiness. It was still of desert sternness and breadth.

From all these impersonal considerations the girl was brought back to the vital phases of her life by the harsh voice of one of the men. "Lize Wetherford is goin' to get jumped one o' these days for sellin' whiskey without a license. I've told her so, too. Everybody knows she's a-doin' it, and what beats me is her goin' along in that way when a little time and money would set her straight with the law."

The shock of all this lay in the fact that Eliza Wetherford was the mother to whom Lee Virginia was returning after ten years of life in the East, and the significance of the man's words froze her blood for an instant. There was an accent of blunt truth in his voice, and the mere fact that a charge of such weight could be openly made appalled the girl, although her recollections of her mother were not entirely pleasant.

The young fellow on the back seat slowly said: "I don't complain of Lize sellin' bad whiskey, but the grub she sets up is fierce."

"The grub ain't so bad; it's the way she stacks it up," remarked another. "But, then, these little fly-bit cow-towns are all alike and all bad, so far as hotels are concerned."

Lee Virginia, crimson and burning hot, was in agony lest they should go further in their criticism.

She knew that her mother kept a boarding-house; and while she was not proud of it, there was nothing precisely disgraceful in it—many widowed women found it the last resort; but this brutal comment on the way in which her business was carried on was like a slash of mud in the face. Her joy in the ride, her impersonal exultant admiration of the mountains was gone, and with flaming cheeks and beating heart she sat, tense and bent, dreading some new and keener thrust.

Happily the conversation turned aside and fell upon the Government's forest policy, and Sam Gregg, a squat, wide-mouthed, harsh-voiced individual, cursed the action of Ross Cavanagh the ranger in the district above the

Fork. "He thinks he's Secretary of War, but I reckon he won't after I interview him. He can't shuffle my sheep around over the hills at his own sweet will."

The young fellow on the back seat quietly interposed. "You want to be sure you've got the cinch on Cavanagh good and square, Sam, or he'll be a-ridin' *you*."

"He certainly is an arbitrary cuss," said the old woman. "They say he was one of Teddy's Rough-riders in the war. He sure can ride and handle a gun. 'Pears like he thinks he's runnin' the whole range," she continued, after a pause. "Cain't nobody so much as shoot a grouse since he came on, and the Supervisor upholds him in it."

Lee Virginia wondered about all this supervision, for it was new to her.

Gregg, the sheepman, went on: "As I tell Redfield, I don't object to the forest policy—it's a good thing for me; I get my sheep pastured cheaper than I could do any other way, but it makes me hot to have grazing lines run on me and my herders jacked up every time they get over the line. Ross run one bunch off the reservation last Friday. I'm going to find out about that. He'll learn he can't get 'arbitrary' with me."

Lee Virginia, glancing back at this man, felt sorry for any one who opposed him, for she recalled him as one of the fiercest of the cattle-men—one ever ready to cut a farmer's fence or burn a sheep-herder's wagon.

The old woman chuckled: "'Pears like you've changed your tune since '98, Sam."

He admitted his conversion shamelessly. "I'm for

whatever will pay best. Just now, with a high tariff, sheep are the boys. So long as I can get on the reserve at seven cents a head—lambs free—I'm going to put every dollar I've got into sheep."

"You're going to get thrown off altogether one of these days," said the young man on the back seat.

Thereupon a violent discussion arose over the question of the right of a sheepman to claim first grass for his flocks, and Gregg boasted that he cared nothing for "the dead-line." "I'll throw my sheep where I please," he declared. "They've tried to run me out of Deer Creek, but I'm there to stay. I have ten thousand more on the way, and the man that tries to stop me will find trouble."

The car was descending into the valley of the Roaring Fork now, and wire fences and alfalfa fields on either side gave further evidence of the change in the land's dominion. New houses of frame and old houses in fresh paint shone vividly from the green of the willows and cottonwoods. A ball-ground on the outskirts of the village was another guarantee of progress. The cowboy was no longer the undisputed prince of the country fair.

Down past the court-house, refurbished and deeper sunk in trees, Lee Virginia rode, recalling the wild night when three hundred armed and vengeful cowboys surrounded it, holding three cattle-barons and their hired invaders against all comers, resolute to be their own judge, jury, and hangman. It was all as peaceful as a Sunday afternoon at this moment, with no sign of the fierce passions of the past.

There were new store-buildings and cement walks along the main street of the town, and here and there a real lawn, cut by a lawn-mower; but as the machine buzzed on toward the river the familiar little old battlemented buildings came to view. The Palace Hotel, half log, half battlement, remained on its perilous site beside the river. The triangle where the trails met still held Halsey's Three Forks Saloon, and next to it stood Markheit's general store, from which the cowboys and citizens had armed themselves during the ten days' war of cattle-men and rustlers.

The car crossed the Roaring Fork and drew up before two small shacks, one of which bore a faded sign, "The Wetherford House," and the other in fresher paint, "The Wetherford Café." On the sidewalk a group of Indians were sitting, and a half-dozen slouching white men stood waiting at the door.

At sight of her mother's hotel Virginia forgot every other building, every other object, and when the driver asked, respectfully, "Where will you want to get off, miss?" she did not reply, but rose unsteadily in her seat, blindly reaching for her bag and her wraps. Her slim, gray-robed figure, graceful even in her dismay, appealed to every onlooker, but Gregg was the one to offer a hand.

"Allow me, miss," he said, with the smile of a wolf.

Declining his aid, she took her bag from the driver and walked briskly up the street as if she were a resident and knew precisely where she wanted to go. "One o' those Eastern tourists, I reckon?" she heard the old woman say.

As she went past the hotel-porch her heart beat hard and her breath shortened. In a flash she divined the truth. She understood why her mother had discouraged her coming home. It was not merely on account of the money—it was because she knew that her business was wrong.

What a squalid little den it was! How cheap, bald, and petty the whole town seemed of a sudden. Lee Virginia halted and turned. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to make herself known. She retraced her steps, pulled open the broken screen door, and entered the café. It was a low, dingy dining-room filled with the odor of ham and bad coffee. At the tables ten or fifteen men, a motley throng, were busily feeding their voracious jaws, and on her left, behind a show-case filled with cigars, stood her mother, looking old, unkempt, and worried. The changes in her were so great that the girl stood in shocked alarm. At last she raised her veil. "Mother," she said, "don't you know me?"

A look of surprise went over the older woman's flabby face—a glow which brought back something of her other self, as she cried: "Why, Lee Virginny, where did you come from?"

The boarders stopped chewing and stared in absorbed interest, while Virginia kissed her blowsy mother.

"By the Lord, it's little Virginny!" said one old fellow. "It's her daughter."

Upon this a mutter of astonishment arose, and the waiter-girls, giggling, marvelling, and envious, paused,

their platters in hand, to exchange comment on the newcomer's hat and gown. A cowboy at the washing-sink in the corner suspended his face-polishing and gaped over his shoulder in silent ecstasy.

For a full minute, so it seemed, this singular, interesting, absorbed immobility lasted; then a seedy little man rose, and approached the girl. His manner was grotesquely graceful as he said: "We are all glad to greet you home again, Miss Virginia."

She gave her hand hesitatingly. "It's Mr. Sifton, isn't it?"

"It is," he replied; "the same old ha'penny, only a little more worn—worn, not polished," he added, with a smile.

She remembered him then—an Englishman, a remittance man, a "lord," they used to say. His eyes were kind, and his mouth, despite its unshaved stubble of beard, was refined. A harmless little man—his own worst enemy, as the saying goes.

Thereupon others of the men came forward to greet her, and though she had some difficulty in recognizing one or two of them (so hardly had the years of her absence used them), she eventually succeeded in placing them all.

At length her mother led her through the archway which connected the two shanties, thence along a narrow hall into a small bedroom, into which the western sunset fell. It was a shabby place, but as a refuge from the crowd in the restaurant it was grateful.

Lize looked at her daughter critically. "I don't know

what I'm going to do with a girl like you.—Why, you're purty—purty as a picture. You were skinny as a child —I'm fair dazed. Great snakes, how you have opened out!—You're the living image of your dad.—What started you back? I told you to stay where you was."

The girl stared at her helplessly, trying to understand herself and her surroundings. There was, in truth, something singularly alien in her mother's attitude. She seemed on the defensive, not wishing to be too closely studied. "Her manner is not even affectionate—only friendly. It is as if I were only an embarrassing visitor," the girl thought. Aloud she said: "I had no place to go after Aunt Celia died. I had to come home."

"You wrote they was willing to keep you."

"They were, but I couldn't ask it of them. I had no right to burden them, and, besides, Mrs. Hall wrote me that you were sick."

"I am; but I didn't want you to come back. Lay off your things and come out to supper. We'll talk afterward."

The eating-house, the rooms and hallways, were all of that desolate shabbiness which comes from shiftlessness joined with poverty. The carpets were frayed and stained with tobacco-juice, and the dusty windows were littered with dead flies. The curtains were ragged, the paper peeling from the walls, and the plastering cracked into unsightly lines. Everything on which the girl's eyes fell contrasted strongly with her aunt's home on the Brandywine—not because that house was large or

luxurious, but because it was exquisitely in order, and sweet with flowers and dainty arrangement of color.

She understood now the final warnings uttered by her friends. "You will find everything changed," they had said, "because you are changed."

She regretted bitterly that she had ever left her Eastern friends. Her mother, in truth, showed little pleasure at her coming, and almost nothing of the illness of which a neighbor had written. It was, indeed, this letter which had decided her to return to the West. She had come, led by a sense of duty, not by affection, for she had never loved her mother as a daughter should —they were in some way antipathetic—and now she found herself an unwelcome guest.

Then, too, the West had called to her: the West of her childhood, the romantic, chivalrous West, the West of the miner, the cattle-man, the wolf, and the eagle. She had returned, led by a poetic sentiment, and here now she sat realizing as if by a flash of inward light that the West she had known as a child had passed, had suddenly grown old and commonplace—in truth, it had never existed at all!

One of the waitresses, whose elaborately puffed and waved hair set forth her senseless vanity, called from the door: "You can come out now, your ma says! Your supper's ready!"

With aching head and shaking knees Virginia reentered the dining-room, which was now nearly empty of its "guests," but was still misty with the steam of food, and swarming with flies. These pests buzzed like

bees around the soiled places on the table-cloths, and one of her mother's first remarks was a fretful apology regarding her trials with those insects. "Seems like you can't keep 'em out," she said.

Lee Virginia presented the appearance of some "settlement worker," some fair lady on a visit to the poor, as she took her seat at the table and gingerly opened the small moist napkin which the waiter dropped before her. Her appetite was gone. Her appetite failed at the very sight of the fried eggs and hot and sputtering bacon, and she turned hastily to her coffee. A fly was in that! She uttered a little choking cry, and buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed.

Lize turned upon the waitress and lashed her with stinging phrases. "Can't you serve things better than this? Take that cup away! My God, you make me tired—fumblin' around here with your eyes on the men! Pay more attention to your work and less to your crimps, and you'll please me a whole lot better!"

With desperate effort Lee conquered her disgust. "Never mind, I'm tired and a little upset. I don't need any dinner."

"The slob will go, just the same. I've put up with her because help is scarce, but here's where she gits off!"

In this moment Virginia perceived that her mother was of the same nature with Mrs. McBride—not one whit more refined—and the gulf between them swiftly widened. Hastily sipping her coffee, she tried hard to keep back the tears, but failed; and no sooner did her mother turn away than she fled to her room, there to sob unrestrained-

ly her despair and shame. "Oh, I can't stand it!" she called. "I can't! I can't!"

Outside, the mountains deepened in splendor, growing each moment more mysterious and beautiful under the sunset sky, but the girl derived no comfort from them. Her loneliness and her perplexities had closed her eyes to their majestic drama. She felt herself alien and solitary in the land of her birth.

Lize came in half an hour later, pathetic in her attempt at "slicking up." She was still handsome in a large-featured way, but her gray hair was there, and her face laid with a network of fretful lines. Her color was bad. At the moment her cheeks were yellow and sunken.

She complained of being short of breath and lame and tired. "I'm always tired," she explained. "'Pears like sometimes I can't scarcely drag myself around, but I do."

A pang of comprehending pain shot through Virginia's heart. If she could not love, she could at least pity and help; and reaching forth her hand, she patted her mother on the knee. "Poor old mammy!" she said. "I'm going to help you."

Lize was touched by this action of her proud daughter, and smiled sadly. "This is no place for you. It's nothin' but a measly little old cow-town gone to seed—and I'm gone to seed with it. I know it. But what is a feller to do? I'm stuck here, and I've got to make a living or quit. I can't quit. I ain't got the grit to eat a dose, and so I stagger along."

"I've come back to help you, mother. You must let me relieve you of some of the burden."

"What can you do, child?" Lize asked, gently.

"I can teach."

"Now in this town you can't."

"Why not?"

"Well, there's a terrible prejudice against—well, against me. And, besides, the places are all filled for the next year. The Wetherfords ain't among the first circles any more."

This daunted the girl more than she could express, but she bravely made advance. "But there must be other schools in the country."

"There are—a few. But I reckon you better pull out and go back, at least, to Sulphur; they don't know so much about me there, and, besides, they're a little more like your kind."

Lee Virginia remembered Gregg's charge against her mother. "What do you mean by the prejudice against you?" she asked.

Lize was evasive. "Since I took to running this restaurant my old friends kind o' fell off—but never mind that to-night. Tell me about things back East. I don't s'pose I'll ever get as far as Omaha again; I used to go with Ed every time I felt like it. He was good to me, your father. If ever there was a prince of a man, Ed Wetherford was him."

The girl's thought was now turned into other half-forgotten channels. "I wish you would tell me more about father. I don't remember where he was buried."

"Neither do I, child—I mean I don't know exactly. You see, after that cattle-war, he went away to Texas."

"I remember, but it's all very dim."

"Well, he never came back and never wrote, and by-and-by word came that he had died and was buried; but I never could go down to see where his grave was at."

"Didn't you know the name of the town?"

"Yes; but it was a new place away down in the Pan Handle, and nobody I knew lived there. And I never knew anything more."

Lee sighed hopelessly. "I hate to think of him lying neglected down there."

"'Pears like the whole world we lived in in them days has slipped off the map," replied the older woman; and as the room was darkening, she rose and lighted a dusty electric globe which dangled from the ceiling over the small table. "Well, I must go back into the restaurant; I hain't got a girl I can trust to count the cash."

Left alone, Lee Virginia wept no more, but her face settled into an expression of stern sadness. It seemed as if her girlhood had died out of her, and that she was about to begin the same struggle with work and worry which had marked the lives of all the women she had known in her childhood.

Out on the porch a raw youth was playing wailing tunes on a mouth-organ, and in the "parlor" a man was uttering silly jokes to a tittering girl. The smell of cheap cigars filled the hallway and penetrated to her nostrils. Every sight and sound sickened her. "Can it be that the old town, the town of my childhood, was of

this character—so sordid, so vulgar?" she asked herself. "And mother—what is the matter with her? She is not even glad to see me!"

Weary with her perplexities, she fastened her door at last, and went to bed, hoping to end—for a few hours, at least—the ache in her heart and the benumbing whirl of her thought.

But this respite was denied her. Almost at once she began to fancy that a multitudinous minute creeping and stirring was going on about her—in her hair, over her neck, across her feet. For a time she explained this by reference to her disordered nerves, but at last some realization of the truth came to her, and she sprang out upon the floor in horror and disgust. Lighting the lamp, she turned to scrutinize her couch. It swarmed with vermin. The ceiling was spattered with them. They raced across the walls in platoons, thin and voracious as wolves.

With a choking, angry, despairing moan she snatched her clothing from the chair and stood at bay. It needed but this touch to complete her disillusionment.

II

THE FOREST RANGER

From her make-shift bed in the middle of the floor Lee Virginia was awakened next morning by the passing of some one down the hall calling at each door, "Six o'clock!" She had not slept at all till after one. She was lame, heart-weary, and dismayed, but she rose and dressed herself as neatly as before. She had decided to return to Sulphur. "I cannot endure this," she had repeated to herself a hundred times. "I *will* not!"

Hearing the clatter of dishes, she ventured (with desperate courage, into the dining-room, which was again filled with cowboys, coal-miners, ranchers and their tousled families, and certain nondescript town loafers of tramp-like appearance. The flies were nearly as bad as ever—but not quite, for under Mrs. Wetherford's dragooning the waiters had made a nerveless assault upon them with newspaper bludgeons, and a few of them had been driven out into the street.

Slipping into a seat at the end of the table which offered the cleanest cloth, Lee Virginia glanced round upon her neighbors with shrinking eyes. All were shovelling their food with knife-blades and guzzling their

coffee with bent heads; their faces scared her, and she dropped her eyes.

At her left, however, sat two men whose greetings were frank and manly, and whose table-manners betrayed a higher form of life. One of them was a tall man with a lean red face against which his blond mustache lay like a chalk-mark. He wore a corduroy jacket, cut in Norfolk style, and in the collar of his yellow shirt a green tie was loosely knotted. His hands were long and freckled, but were manifestly trained to polite usages.

The other man was younger and browner, and of a compact, athletic figure. On the breast of his olive-green coat hung a silver badge which bore a pine-tree in the centre. His shirt was tan-colored and rough, but his head was handsome. He looked like a young officer in the undress uniform of the regular army. His hands were strong but rather small, and the lines of his shoulders graceful. Most attractive of all were his eyes, so brown, so quietly humorous, and so keen.

In the rumble of cheap and vulgar talk the voices of these men appealed to the troubled girl with great charm. She felt more akin to them than to any one else in the room, and from time to time she raised her eyes to their faces.

They were aware of her also, and their gaze was frankly admiring as well as wondering; and in passing the ham and eggs or the sugar they contrived to show her that they considered her a lady in a rough place, and that they would like to know more about her.

She accepted their civilities with gratitude, and listened

to their talk with growing interest. It seemed that the young man had come down from the hills to meet his friend and take him back to his cabin.

"I can't do it to-day, Ross," said the older man. "I wish I could, but one meal of this kind is all I can stand these days."

"You're getting finicky," laughed the younger man.

"I'm getting old. Time was when my fell of hair would rise at nothing, not even flies in the butter, but now—"

"That last visit to the ancestral acres is what did it."

"No, it's age—age and prosperity. I know now what it is to have broiled steak."

Mrs. Wetherford, seizing the moment, came down to do the honors. "You fellers ought to know my girl. Virginny, this is Forest Supervisor Redfield, and this is Ross Cavanagh, his forest ranger in this district. You ought to know each other. My girl's just back from school, and she don't think much of the Fork. It's a little too coarse for her."

Lee flushed under this introduction, and her distress was so evident that both men came to her rescue.

The older man bowed, and said: "I didn't know you had a daughter, Mrs. Wetherford," And Cavanagh, with a glance of admiration, added: "We've been wondering who you might be."

Lize went on: "I thought I'd got rid of her." She's been away now for about ten years. I don't know but it was a mistake—look's like she's grown a little too fine-haired for us doughies out here."

"So much the worse for us," replied Redfield.

This little dialogue gave the girl time to recover herself, but as Cavanagh watched the blush fade from her face, leaving it cold and white, he sympathized with her—pitied her from the bottom of his heart. He perceived that he was a chance spectator of the first scene in a painful domestic drama—one that might easily become a tragedy. He wondered what the forces might be which had brought such a daughter to this sloven, this virago. To see a maid of this delicate bloom thrust into such a place as Lize Wetherford's "hotel" had the reputation of being roused indignation.

"When did you reach town?" he asked, and into his voice his admiration crept.

"Only last night."

"You find great changes here?"

"Not so great as in my mother. It's all—" She stopped abruptly, and he understood.

Lize being drawn back to her cash-register, Redfield turned to say: "My dear young lady, I don't suppose you remember me, but I knew you when you were a tot of five or six. I knew your father very well."

"Did you?" Her face lighted up.

"Yes, poor fellow, he went away from here rather under a cloud, you know."

"I remember a little of it. I was here when the shooting took place."

"So you were. Well, since then much has happened to us all," he explained to the ranger. "There wasn't room for a dashing young blood such as Ed Wetherford

was in those days." He turned to Lee. "He was no worse than the men on the other side—it was dog eat dog; but some way the people rather settled on him as a scapegoat. He was forced out, and your mother has borne the brunt of it since. Those were lawless days."

It was a painful subject, and Redfield's voice grew lower and more hesitant as he went on. Looking at this charming girl through the smoke of fried ham, with obscene insects buzzing about her fair head, made him feel for the thousandth time, and more keenly than ever before, the amazing combinations in American society. How could she be the issue of Edward and Eliza Wetherford?

More and more Lee Virginia's heart went out in trust toward these two men. Opposed to the malodorous, unshaven throng which filled the room, they seemed wondrously softened and sympathetic, and in the ranger's gaze was something else—something which made her troubles somehow less intolerable. She felt that he understood the difficult situation in which she found herself.

Redfield went on. "You find us horribly uncivilized after ten years' absence?"

"I find *this* uncivilized," she replied, with fierce intensity, looking around the room. Then, on the impulse, she added: "I can't stand it! I came here to live with my mother, but this is too—too horrible!"

"I understand your repulsion," replied Redfield. "A thousand times I repeat, apropos of this country, 'Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile.'"

"Do you suppose it was as bad ten years ago?" she asked. "Was everything as dirty—as mean? Were the houses then as full of flies and smells?"

"I'm afraid they were. Of course, the country isn't all like this, and there are neat homes and gentle people in Sulphur; but most cattle-men are—as they've always been—a shiftless, happy-go-lucky lot at best—and some of them have been worse, as you know."

"I never dreamed of finding my mother in such a place," she went on. "I don't know what to do or say. She isn't well. I ought to stay and help her, and yet—oh, it is disheartening!"

Lize tapped Redfield on the shoulder. "Come over here, Reddy, if you've finished your breakfast; I want to talk with you."

Redfield rose and followed his landlady behind the counter, and there sat in earnest conversation while she made change. The tone in which her mother addressed the Supervisor, her action of touching him as one man lays hand upon another, was profoundly revealing to Lee Virginia. She revolted from it without realizing exactly what it meant; and feeling deeply but vaguely the forest ranger's sympathy, she asked:

"How *can* you endure this kind of life?"

"I can't, and I don't," he answered, cautiously, for they were being closely observed. "I am seldom in town; my dominion is more than a mile above this level. My cabin is nine thousand feet above the sea. It is clean and quiet up there."

"Are all the other restaurants in the village like this?"

"Worse. I come here because it is the best."

She rose. "I can't stand this air and these flies any longer. They're too disgusting."

He followed her into the other house, conscious of the dismay and bitterness which burst forth the instant they were alone. "What am I to do? She is my mother, but I've lost all sense of relationship to her. And these people—except you and Mr. Redfield—are all disgusting to me. It isn't because my mother is poor, it isn't because she's keeping boarders; it's something else." At this point her voice failed her.

The ranger, deeply moved, stood helplessly silent. What could he say? He knew a great deal better than she the essential depravity of her mother, and he felt keenly the cruelty of fate which had plunged a fine young spirit into this swamp of ill-smelling humanity.

"Let us go out into the air," he suggested, presently. "The mountain wind will do you good."

She followed him trustfully, and as she stepped from the squalor of the hotel into the splendor of the morning her head lifted. She drank the clear, crisp wind as one takes water in the desert.

"The air is clean, anyway," she said.

Cavanagh, to divert her, pointed away to the mountains. "There is my dominion. Up there I am sole ruler. No one can litter the earth with corruption or poison the streams."

She did not speak, but as she studied the ranger her face cleared. "It *is* beautiful up there."

He went on. "I hate all this scrap-heap quite as heart-

ily as you do, but up there is sweetness and sanity. The streams are germless, and the forest cannot be devastated. That is why I am a ranger. I could not endure life in a town like this."

He turned up the street toward the high hill to the south, and she kept step with him. As she did not speak, he asked: "What did you expect to do out here?"

"I hoped to teach," she replied, her voice still choked with her emotion. "I expected to find the country much improved."

"And so it is; but it is still a long way from an Eastern State. Perhaps you will find the people less savage than they appear at first glance."

"It isn't the town or the people, it is my mother!" she burst forth again. "Tell me! A woman in the car yesterday accused my mother of selling whiskey unlawfully. Is this so? Tell me!"

She faced him resolutely, and perceiving that she could not be evaded, he made slow answer. "I don't *know* that she does, but I've heard it charged against her."

"Who made the charge?"

"One of the clergymen, and then it's common talk among the rough men of the town."

"Is that the worst they say of her? Be honest with me—I want to know the worst."

He was quite decisive as he said: "Yes, that is the worst."

She looked relieved. "I'm glad to hear you say so. I've been imagining all kinds of terrifying things."

"Then, too, her bad health is some excuse for her housekeeping," he added, eager to lessen the daughter's humiliation, "and you must remember her associations are not those which breed scrupulous regard for the proprieties."

"But she's my mother!" wailed the girl, coming back to the central fact. "She has sent me money—she has been kind to me—what am I to do? She needs me, and yet the thought of staying here and facing her life frightens me."

The rotten board walks, the low rookeries, the unshaven, blear-eyed men sitting on the thresholds of the saloons, the slattern squaws wandering abroad like bedraggled hens, made the girl stare with wonder and dismay. She had remembered the town street as a highway filled with splendid cavaliers, a list wherein heroic deeds were done with horse and pistol.

She recognized one of those "knights of the lariat" sitting in the sun, flabby, grizzled, and inert. Another was trying to mount his horse with a bottle in his hand. She recalled him perfectly. He had been her girlish ideal of manly beauty. Now here he was, old and mangy with drink at forty. In a most vivid and appealing sense he measured the change in her as well as the decay of the old-time cowboy. His incoherent salutation as his eyes fell upon her was like the final blasphemous word from the rear-guard of a savage tribe, and she watched him ride away reeling limply in his saddle as one watches a carrion-laden vulture take its flight.

She perceived in the ranger the man of the new order,

and with this in her mind she said: "You don't belong here? You're not a Western man."

"Not in the sense of having been born here," he replied. "I am, in fact, a native of England, though I've lived nearly twenty years of my life in the States."

She glanced at his badge. "How did you come to be a ranger—what does it mean? It's all new to me."

"It is new to the West," he answered, smilingly, glad of a chance to turn her thought from her own personal griefs. "It has all come about since you went East. Uncle Sam has at last become provident, and is now 'conserving his resources.' I am one of his representatives with stewardship over some ninety thousand acres of territory—mostly forest."

She looked at him with eyes of changing light. "You don't talk like an Englishman, and yet you are not like the men out here."

"I shouldn't care to be like some of them," he answered. "My being here is quite logical. I went into the cattle business like many another, and I went broke. I served under Colonel Roosevelt in the Cuban War, and after my term was out, naturally drifted back. I love the wilderness and have some natural taste for forestry, and I can ride and pack a horse as well as most cowboys, hence my uniform. I'm not the best forest ranger in the service, I'll admit, but I fancy I'm a fair average."

"And that is your badge—the pine-tree?"

"Yes, and I am proud of it. Some of the fellows are not, but so far as I am concerned I am glad to be known as a defender of the forest. A tree means much to me.

I never mark one for felling without a sense of responsibility to the future."

Her questions came slowly, like those of a child. "Where do you live?"

"Directly up the South Fork, about twenty miles."

"What do you do?"

He smiled. "Not much. I ride the trails, guard the game, put out fires, scale lumber, burn brush, build bridges, herd cattle, count sheep, survey land, and a few other odd chores. It's supposed to be a soft snap, but I can't see it that way."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes, for the larger part of the time. I have an assistant who is with me during part of the summer months. Mostly I am alone. However, I am supposed to keep open house, and I catch a visitor now and then."

They were both more at ease now, and her unaffected interest pleased him.

She went on, steadily: "Don't you get very lonely?"

"In winter, sometimes; in summer I'm too busy to get lonely. In the fire season I'm in the saddle every day, and sometimes all night."

"Who cooks for you?"

"I do. That's part of a ranger's job. We have no 'servant problem' to contend with."

"Do you expect to do this always?"

He smiled again. "There you touch my secret spring. I have the hope of being Chief Forester some time—I mean we all have the prospect of promotion to sustain us. The service is so new that any one with even a knowledge

of forestry is in demand; by and by real foresters will arise."

She returned abruptly to her own problem. "I dread to go back to my mother, but I must. Oh, how I hate that hotel! I loathe the flies, the smells, the people that eat there, the waiters—everything!" She shuddered.

"Many of the evils you mention could be reformed—except, of course, some of the people who come to eat. I fear several of them have gone beyond reformation."

As they started back down the street she saw the motor-stage just leaving the door of the office. "That settles one question," she said. "I can't get away till to-morrow."

"Where would you go if you broke camp—back to the East?"

"No; my mother thinks there is a place for me in Sulphur City."

"Your case interests me deeply. I wish I could advise you to stay, but this is a rough town for a girl like you. Why don't you talk the problem over with the Supervisor?" His voice became firmer. "Mrs. Redfield is the very one to help you."

"Where does she live?"

"Their ranch lies just above Sulphur, at the mouth of the Canon. May I tell him what you've told me? He's a good sort, is Redfield—much better able to advise than I am."

Cavanagh found himself enjoying the confidence of this girl so strangely thrown into his care, and the curious comment of the people in the street did not disturb

him, except as it bore upon his companion's position in the town.

At the door of the hotel some half-a-dozen men were clustered. As the young couple approached they gave way, but a short, powerful man, whom Lee Virginia recognized as Gregg the sheepman, called to the ranger:

"I want to see you before you leave town, Mr. Ranger."

"Very well. I shall be here all the forenoon," answered Cavanagh, in the tone of a man accepting a challenge; then, turning to the girl, he said, earnestly: "I want to help you. I shall be here for lunch, and meanwhile I wish you would take Redfield into your confidence. He's a wise old boy, and everybody knows him. No one doubts his motives; besides, he has a family, and is rich and unhurried. Would you like me to talk with him?"

"If you will. I want to do right—indeed I do."

"I'm sure of that," he said, with eyes upon her flushed and quivering face. "There's a way out, believe me."

They parted on the little porch of the hotel, and her eyes followed his upright figure till he entered one of the shops. He had precisely the look and bearing of a young lieutenant in the regular army, and she wondered what Gregg's demand meant. In his voice was both menace and contempt.

She returned to her own room, strangely heartened by her talk with the ranger. "If I stay here another night this room must be cleaned," she decided, and approached the bed as though it harbored venomous reptiles. "This

is one of the things that must be reformed," she decided, harking back to the ranger's quiet remark.

She was still pondering ways and means of making the room habitable when her mother came in.

"How'd you sleep last night?"

Lee Virginia could not bring herself to lie. "Not very well," she admitted.

"Neither did I. Fact of the matter is your coming fairly upset me. I've been kind o' used up for three months. I don't know what ails me. I'd ought to go up to Sulphur to see a doctor, but there don't seem to be any free time. I 'pear to have lost my grip. Food don't give me any strength. I saw you talking with Ross Cavanagh. There's a man—and Reddy. Reddy is what you may call a fancy rancher—goes in for alfalfy and fruit, and all that. He isn't in the forest service for the pay or for graft. He's got a regular palace up there above Sulphur—hot and cold water all through the house, a furnace in the cellar, and two bath-rooms, so they tell me; I never was in the place. Well, I must go back—I can't trust them girls a minute." She turned with a groan of pain. "'Pears like every joint in me is a-creakin' to-day."

"Can't I take your place?" asked Lee Virginia, pity deepening in her heart as she caught the look of suffering on her mother's face.

"No; you better keep out o' the caffy. It ain't a fit place for you. Fact is, I weren't expecting anything so fine as you are. I laid awake till three o'clock last night figurin' on what to do. I reckon you'd better go back and

give this outfit up as a bad job. I used to tell Ed you didn't belong to neither of us, and you don't. I can't see where you *did* come from—anyhow, I don't want the responsibility of havin' you here. Why, you'll have half the men in the county hitchin' to my corral—and the males out here are a fierce lot o' brutes." She studied the girl again, finding her so dainty, so far above herself, that she added: "It would be a cruel shame for me to keep you here, with all these he-wolves roamin' around. You're too good to be meat for any of them. You just plan to pack up and pull out to-morrow."

She went out with a dragging step that softened the girl's heart. It was true there was little of real affection between them. Her memories of Eliza up to this moment had been rather mixed. As a child she had seldom been in her arms, and she had always been a little afraid of the bold, bright, handsome creature who rode horses and shot pistols like a man. It was hard to relate the Eliza Wetherford of those days with this flabby, limping old woman, and yet her daughter came nearer to loving her at this moment than at any time since her fifth year.

III

LEE VIRGINIA WAGES WAR

In truth, Lize had risen that morning intending "to whirl in and clean up the house," being suddenly conscious to some degree of the dirt and disorder around her, but she found herself physically unequal to the task. Her brain seemed misted, and her food had been a source of keen pain to her. Hence, after a few half-hearted orders, she had settled into her broad chair behind the counter and there remained, brooding over her maternal responsibilities.

She gave sharp answers to all the men who came up to ask after her daughter, and to one who remarked on the girl's good looks, and demanded an introduction, she said: "Get along! I'd as soon introduce her to a goat. Now you fellers want to understand I'll kill the man that sets out to fool with my girl, I tell you that!"

While yet Lee Virginia was wondering how to begin the day's work, some one knocked on her door, and in answer to her invitation a woman stepped in—a thin blond hag with a weak smile and watery blue eyes. "Is this little Lee Virginny?" she asked.

The girl rose. "Yes."

"Well, howdy!" She extended her hand, and Lee took

it. "My name's Jackson—Mrs. Orlando Jackson. I knew yore pa and you before 'the war.'"

Lee Virginia dimly recalled such a family, and asked: "Where do you live?"

"We hole up down here on a ranch about twenty miles—stayed with yore ma last night—thought I'd jest nacherly look in and say howdy. Are ye back fer to stay?"

"No, I don't think so. Will you sit down?"

Mrs. Jackson took a seat. "Come back to see how yore ma was, I reckon? Found her pretty porely, didn't ye?" She lowered her voice. "I think she's got cancer of the stummick—now that's my guess."

Virginia started. "What makes you think so?"

"Well, I knew a woman who went just that way. Had that same flabby, funny look—and that same distress after eatin'. I told her this mornin' she'd better go up to Sulphur and see that new doctor. You see, yore ma has always been a reckless kind of a critter—more like a man than a woman, God knows—an' how she ever got a girl like you I don't fairly understand. I reckon you must be what the breedin' men call 'a throw-back,' for yore pa wa'n't much to brag of, 'ceptin' for looks—he certainly was good-lookin'. He used to sober down when he got where you was; but my—good God!—weren't they a pair to draw to? I've heard 'Lando tell tales of yore ma's doin's that would 'fright ye. Not that she fooled with men," she hastened to say. "Lord, no! For her the sun rose and set in Ed Wetherford. She'd leave you any day, and go on the round-up with him. It nigh

about broke her up in business when Ed hit the far-away trail."

The girl perceived that in her visitor she had one of these self-oiled human talking-machines "with tongue hung in the middle," as the old saying goes, and she was dimly conscious of having heard her many times before. "You don't look very well yourself," she said.

"Me? Oh, I'm like one o' these Injun dawgs—can't kill me. I've been on the range so long I'm tough as dried beef. It's a fierce old place for a woman—or it was before 'the war'—since then it's kind o' softened down a hair."

"What do you mean by 'the war'?"

"Why, you remember the rustler war? We date everything out here from that year. You was here, for I saw ye—a slob of a child."

"Oh!" exclaimed Virginia. "I understand now. Yes, I was here. I saw my father at the head of the cowboys."

"They weren't cowboys; they were hired killers from Texas. That's what let yore pa out o' the State. He were on the wrong side, and if it hadn't 'a' been for the regular soldiers he'd 'a' been wiped out right hyer. As it was he had to skip the range, and hain't never been back. I don't s'pose folks will lay it up agin you—bein' a girl—but they couldn't no *son* of Ed Wetherford come back here and settle, not for a minute. Why, yore ma has had to bluff the whole county a'most—not that *I* lay anything up agin her. I tell folks she was that bewitched with Ed she couldn't see things any way but his way. She fought to save his ranch and stawk and—

but hell! she couldn't do nothin'—and then to have him go back on her the way he did — slip out 'twixt two days, and never write; that just about shot her to pieces. I never could understand that in Ed, he 'peared so mortally fond of you and of her, too. He sure was fond of you!" She shook her head. "No, can't anybody make me believe Ed Wetherford is alive."

Lee Virginia started. "Who says he's alive?"

"Now don't get excited, girl. He ain't alive; but yet folks say we don't *know* he's dead. He jest dropped out so far as yore ma is concerned, and so far as the county is concerned; but some thought you was with him in the East."

The girl was now aware that her visitor was hoping to gain some further information, and so curtly answered: "I've never seen my father since that night the soldiers came and took him away to the fort. And my mother told me he died down in Texas."

Mrs. Jackson seemed a little disappointed, but she smoothed the dress over her sharp knees, and continued: "Right there the good old days ended for yore ma—and for us. The cattle business has been steadily on the chute—that is, the free-range business. I saw it comin', an' I says to Jackson, 'Camp on some river-bottom and chuck in the alfalfy,' I says. An' that's what we did. We got a little bunch o' cattle up in the park—Uncle Sam's man is lookin' after 'em." She grinned. "Jackson kicked at the fee, but I says: 'Twenty cents a head is cheap pasture. We're lucky to get any grass at all, now that everybody's goin' in for sheep. 'Pears

like the sheepmen air gettin' bolder and bolder in this free-range graft, and I'm a-bettin' on trouble.'" She rose. "Well, I'm glad to 've had a word with ye; but you hear me: yore ma has got to have doctor's help, or she's a-goin' to fall down some day soon."

Every word the woman uttered, every tone of her drawling voice, put Lee Virginia back into the past. She heard again the swift gallop of hooves, saw once more the long line of armed ranchers, and felt the hush of fear that lay over the little town on that fateful day. The situation became clearer in her mind. She recalled vividly the words of astonishment and hate with which the women had greeted her mother on the morning when the news came that Edward Wetherford was among the invading cattle-barons—was, indeed, one of the leaders.

In Philadelphia the Rocky Mountain States were synonyms of picturesque lawlessness, the theatre of reckless romance, and Virginia Wetherford, loyal daughter of the West, had defended it; but in the coarse phrase of this lean rancheress was pictured a land of border warfare as ruthless as that which marked the Scotland of Rob Roy.

Commonplace as the little town looked at the moment, it had been the scene of many a desperate encounter, as the girl herself could testify, for she had seen more than one man killed therein. Some way the hideousness of these scenes had never shown itself to her—perhaps because she had been a child at the time, and had thrilled to the delicious excitement of it; but now, as she imagined it all happening again before her eyes, she shivered with

horror. How monstrous, how impossible those killings now seemed!

Then her mind came back to her mother's ailment. Eliza Wetherford had never been one to complain, and her groans meant real suffering.

Her mind resolved upon one thing. "She must see a doctor," she decided. And with this in mind she re-entered the café, where Lize was again in violent altercation with a waitress.

"Mother," called Lee, "I want to see you."

With a parting volley of vituperation, Mrs. Wetherford followed her daughter back into the lodging-house.

"Mother," the girl began, facing her and speaking firmly, "you must go to Sulphur City and see a doctor. I'll stay here and look after the business."

Mrs. Wetherford perceived in her daughter's attitude and voice something decisive and powerful. She sank into a chair, and regarded her with intent gaze. "Hett Jackson's been gabblin' to you," she declared. "Hett knows more fool things that ain't so than any old heffer I know. She said I was about all in, didn't she? Prophesied I'd fall down and stay? I know her."

Lee Virginia remained firm. "I'm not going by what she said, I've got eyes of my own. You need help, and if the doctor here can't help you, you must go to Sulphur or to Kansas City. I can run the boarding-house till you get back."

Eliza eyed her curiously. "Don't you go to countin' on this 'chivalry of the West' which story-writers put into

books. These men out here will eat you up if you don't watch out. I wouldn't dare to leave you here alone. No, what I'll do is sell the place, if I can, and both of us get out."

"But you need a doctor this minute."

"I'll be all right in a little while; I'm always the worst for an hour or two after I eat. This little squirt of a local doctor gave me some dope to ease that pain, but I've got my doubts—I don't want any morphine habit in mine. No, daughter Virginny, it's mighty white of you to offer, but you don't know what you're up against when you contract to step into my shoes."

Visions of reforming methods about the house passed through the girl's mind. "There must be something I can do. Why don't you have the doctor come down here?"

"I might do that if I get any worse, but I hate to have you stay in the house another night. It's only fit for these goats of cowboys and women like Hett Jackson. Did the bugs eat you last night?"

Virginia flushed. "Yes."

Eliza's face fell. "I was afraid of that. You can't keep 'em out. The cowboys bring 'em in by the quart."

"They can be destroyed—and the flies, too, can't they?"

"When you've bucked flies and bugs as long as I have, you'll be less 'peart about it. I don't care a hoot in Hades till somebody like you or Reddy or Ross comes along. Most of the men that camp with me are like Injuns, anyway—they wouldn't feel natural without

bugs a ticklin' 'em. No, child, you get ready and pull out on the Sulphur stage to-morrow. I'll pay your way back to Philadelphy."

"I can't leave you now, mother. Now that I know you're ill, I'm going to stay and take care of you."

Lize rose. "See here, girl, don't you go to idealizin' me, neither. I'm what the boys call an old battle-axe. I've been through the whole war. I'm able to feed myself and pay your board besides. Just you find some decent boarding-place in Sulphur, and I'll see that you have ten dollars a week to live on, just because you're a Wetherford."

"But I'm your daughter!"

Again Eliza fixed a musing look upon her. "I reckon if the truth was known your aunt Celia was nigher to being your mother than I ever was. They always said you was all Wetherford, and I reckon they were right. I always liked men better than babies. So long as I had your father, you didn't count—now that's the God's truth. And I didn't intend that you should ever come back here. I urged you to stay—you know that."

Lee Virginia imagined all this to be a savage self-accusation which sprang from long self-bereavement, and yet there was something terrifying in its brutal frankness. She stood in silence till her mother left the room, then went to her own chamber with a painful knot in her throat. What could she do with elemental savagery of this sort?

The knowledge that she must spend another night in the bed led her to active measures of reform. With dis-

gustful desperation, she emptied the room and swept it as with fire and sword. Her change of mind, from the passive to the active state, relieved and stimulated her, and she hurried from one needed reform to another. She drew others into the vortex. She inspired the chambermaid to unwilling yet amazing effort, and the lodging-house endured such a blast from the besom that it stood in open-windowed astonishment uttering dust like the breath of a dragon. Having swept and garnished the bed-chambers, Virginia moved on the dining-room. As the ranger had said, this, too, could be reformed.

Unheeding her mother's protests, she organized the giggling waiters into a warring party, and advanced upon the flies. By hissing and shooing, and the flutter of newspapers, they drove the enemy before them, and a carpenter was called in to mend screen doors and windows, thus preventing their return. New shades were hung to darken the room, and new table-cloths purchased to replace the old ones, and the kitchen had such a cleaning as it had not known before in five years.

In this work the time passed swiftly, and when Redfield and Cavanagh came again to lunch they exclaimed in astonishment—as, indeed, every one did.

"How's this?" queried Cavanagh, humorously. "Has the place 'changed hands?'"

Lize was but grimly responsive. "Seem's like it has."

"I hope the price has not gone up?"

"Not yet."

Redfield asked: "Who's responsible for this — your new daughter?"

"You've hit it. She's started right in to polish us all up to city standards."

"We need it," commented Cavanagh, in admiration of the girl's prompt action. "This room is almost civilized, still we'll sort o' miss the flies."

Lize apologized. "Well, you know a feller gits kind o' run down like a clock, and has to have some outsider wind him up now and again. First I was mad, then I was scared, but now I'm cheerin' the girl on. She can run the whole blame outfit if she's a mind to—even if I go broke for it. The work she got out o' them slatter-heels of girls is a God's wonder."

Ross looked round for Virginia, but could not find her. She had seen him come in, and was out in the kitchen doing what she could to have his food brought in and properly served.

Redfield reassured the perturbed proprietor of "the joint." "No fear of going broke, madam — quite the contrary. A few little touches like this, and you'll be obliged to tear down and build bigger. I don't believe I'd like to see your daughter run this eating-house as a permanent job, but if she starts in I'm sure she'll make a success of it."

Lee Virginia came in flushed and self-conscious, but far lighter of spirit than at breakfast; and stood beside the table while the waitress *laid* the dishes before her guests with elaborate assumption of grace and design. Hitherto she had bumped them down with a slash of

slangy comment. The change was quite as wonderful as the absence of the flies.

"Do we owe these happy reforms to you?" asked Cavanagh, admiring Virginia's neat dress and glowing cheeks.

"Partly," she answered. "I was desperate. I had to do something, so I took to ordering people around."

"I understand," he said. "Won't you sit at our table again?"

"Please do," said Redfield. "I want to talk with you."

She took a seat—a little hesitantly. "You see, I studied Domestic Science at school, and I've never had a chance to apply it before."

"Here's your opportunity," Redfield assured her. "My respect for the science of domestics is growing—I marvel to think what another week will bring forth. I think I'll have to come down again just to observe the improvement in the place."

"It can't last," Lize interjected. "She'll catch the Western habits—she'll sag, same as we all do."

"No she won't," declared Ross, with intent to encourage her. "If you give her a free hand, I predict she'll make your place the wonder and boast of the county-side."

"When do you go back to the mountains?" Lee Virginia asked, a little later.

"Immediately after my luncheon," he replied.

She experienced a pang of regret, and could not help showing it a little. "Your talk helped me," she said; "I've decided to stay, and be of use to my mother."

Redfield overheard this, and turned toward her.

"This is a rough school for you, Lee Virginia, and I should dislike seeing you settle down to it for life: but it can't hurt you if you are what I think you are. Nothing can soil or mar the mind that wills for good. I want Mrs. Redfield to know you; I'm sure her advice will be helpful. I hope you'll come up and see us if you decide to settle in Sulphur—or if you don't."

"I should like to do so," she said, touched by the tone as well as by the words of his invitation.

"Redfield's house is one of the few completely civilized homes in the State," put in Cavanagh. "When I get so weary of cuss-words and poaching and graft that I can't live without killing some one, I go down to Elk Lodge and smoke and read the Supervisor's London and Paris weeklies and recover my tone."

Redfield smiled. "When I get weak-kneed or careless in the service and feel my self-respect slipping away, I go up to Ross's cabin and talk with a man who represents the impersonal, even-handed justice of the Federal law."

Cavanagh laughed. "There! Having handed each other reciprocal bouquets, we can now tell Miss Wetherford the truth. Each of us thinks very well of himself, and we're both believers in the New West."

"What do you mean by the New West?" asked the girl.

"Well, the work you've been doing here this morning is a part of it," answered Redfield. "It's a kind of house-cleaning. The Old West was picturesque and, in a way, manly and fine—certain phases of it were heroic—and I hate to see it all pass, but some of us began to realize that

it was not all poetry. The plain truth is my companions for over twenty years were lawless ruffians, and the cattle business as we practiced it in those days was founded on selfishness and defended at the mouth of the pistol. We were all pensioners on Uncle Sam, and fighting to keep the other fellow off from having a share of his bounty. It was all wasteful, half-savage. We didn't want settlement, we didn't want law, we didn't want a State. We wanted free range. We were a line of pirates from beginning to end, and we're not wholly reformed yet."

He was talking to the whole table now, for all were listening. No other man on the range could say these things with the same authority, for Hugh Redfield was known all over the State as a man who had been one of the best riders and ropers in his outfit—one who had started in as a common hand at herding, and who had been entirely through "the war."

Lee Virginia listened with a stirring of the blood. Her recollections of the range were all of the heroic. She recalled the few times when she was permitted to go on the round-up, and to witness the breaking of new horses, and the swiftness, grace, and reckless bravery of the riders, the moan and surge of herds, the sweep of horsemen, came back and filled her mind with large and free and splendid pictures. And now it was passing—or past!

Some one at the table accused Redfield of being more of a town-site boomer than a cattle-man.

He was quite unmoved by this charge. "The town-site boomer at least believes in progress. He does not

go so far as to shut out settlement. If a neat and tidy village or a well-ordered farmstead is not considered superior to a cattle-ranch littered with bones and tin cans, or better than even a cow-town whose main industry is whiskey-selling, then all civilized progress is a delusion. When I was a youngster these considerations didn't trouble me. I liked the cowboy life and the careless method of the plains, but I've some girls growing up now, and I begin to see the whole business in a new light. I don't care to have my children live the life I've lived. Besides, what right have we to stand in the way of a community's growth? Suppose the new life *is* less picturesque than the old? We don't like to leave behind us the pleasures and sports of boyhood; but we grow up, nevertheless. I'm far more loyal to the State as Forest Supervisor than I was when I was riding with the cattle-men to scare up the nester."

He uttered all this quite calmly, but his ease of manner, his absolute disregard of consequences, joined with his wealth and culture, gave his words great weight and power. No one was ready with an answer but Lize, who called out, with mocking accent: "Reddy, you're too good for the Forest Service, you'd ought 'o be our next Governor."

This was a centre shot. Redfield flushed, and Cavanagh laughed. "Mr. Supervisor, you are discovered!"

Redfield recovered himself. "I should like to be Governor of this State for about four years, but I'm likelier to be lynched for being in command of twenty 'Cossacks.'"

At this moment Sam Gregg entered the room, followed by a young man in an English riding-suit. Seeing that "the star-boarder table" offered a couple of seats, they pointed that way. Sam was plainly in war-like frame of mind, and slammed his sombrero on its nail with the action of a man beating an adversary.

"That is Sam Gregg and his son Joe—used to be ranch cattle-man, now one of our biggest sheepmen," Cavanagh explained. "He's bucking the cattle-men now."

Lee Virginia studied young Gregg with interest, for his dress was that of a man to whom money came easy, and his face was handsome, though rather fat and sullen. In truth, he had been brought into the room by his father to see "Lize Wetherford's girl," and his eyes at once sought and found her. A look of surprise and pleasure at once lit his face.

Gregg was sullen because of his interview with Cavanagh, which had been in the nature of a grapple; and in the light of what Redfield had said, Lee Virginia was able to perceive in these two men a struggle for supremacy. Gregg was the greedy West checked and restrained by the law.

Every man in the room knew that Gregg was a bitter opponent of the Forest Service, and that he "had it in" for the ranger; and some of them knew that he was throwing more sheep into the forest than his permits allowed, and that a clash with Redfield was sure to come. It was just like the burly old Irishman to go straight to the table where his adversary sat.

Virginia's eyes fell before the gaze of these two men,

for they had none of the shyness or nothing of the indirection of the ruder men she had met. They expressed something which angered her, though she could not have told precisely why.

Redfield did not soften his words on Gregg's account; on the contrary he made them still more cutting and to the line.

"The mere fact that I live near the open range or a national forest does not give me any *rights* in the range or forest," he was saying, as Gregg took his seat. "I enjoy the *privilege* of these Government grazing grounds, and I ought to be perfectly willing to pay the fee. These forests are the property of the whole nation; they are public lands, and should yield a revenue to the whole nation. It is silly to expect the Government to go on enriching a few of us stockmen at the expense of others. I see this, and I accept the change."

"After you've got rich at it," said Gregg.

"Well, haven't you?" retorted Redfield. "Are you so greedy that nothing will stop you?"

Lize threw in a wise word. "The sporting-houses of Kansas City and Chicago keep old Sam poor."

A roar of laughter followed this remark, and Gregg was stumped for a moment; but the son grinned appreciatively. "Now be good!"

Cavanagh turned to Virginia in haste to shield her from all that lay behind and beneath this sally of the older and deeply experienced woman. "The Supervisor is willing to yield a point—he knows what the New West will bring."

Gregg growled out: "I'm not letting any of my rights slip."

The girl was troubled by the war-light which she saw in the faces of the men about her, and vague memories of the words and stories she had overchanced to hear in her childhood came back to her mind—hints of the drunken orgies of the cowboys who went to the city with cattle, and the terrifying suggestion of their attitude toward all womankind. She set Cavanagh and his chief quite apart from all the others in the room, and at first felt that in young Gregg was another man of education and right living—but in this she was misled.

Lize had confidence enough in the ranger to throw in another malicious word. "Ross, old Bullfrog came down here to chase you up a tree—so he said. Did he do it?"

Gregg looked ugly. "I'm not done with this business."

She turned to Ross. "Don't let him scare you—his beller is a whole lot worse than his bite."

This provoked another laugh, and Gregg was furious —all the more so that his son joined in. "I'll have your head, Mr. Supervisor; I'll carry my fight to the Secretary."

"Very well," returned Redfield, "carry it to the President if you wish. I simply repeat that your sheep must correspond to your permit, and if you don't send up and remove the extra number I will do it myself. I don't make the rules of the department. My job is to carry them out."

By this time every person in the room was tense with interest. They all knew Gregg and his imperious methods. He was famous for saying once (when in his

cups): "I always thought sheepmen were blankety blank sons of guns, and now I'm one of 'em I *know* they are." Some of the cattle-men in the room had suffered from his greed, and while they were not partisans of the Supervisor they were glad to see him face his opponent fearlessly.

Lize delivered a parting blow. "Bullfrog, you and me are old-timers. We're on the losing side. We belong to the 'good old days' when the Fork was 'a man's town,' and to be 'shot up' once a week kept us in news. But them times are past. You can't run the range that way any more. Why, man, you'll have to buy and fence your own pasture in a few years more, or else pay rent same as I do. You stockmen kick like steers over paying a few old cents a head for five months' range; you'll be mighty glad to pay a dollar one o' these days. Take your medicine—that's my advice." And she went back to her cash-drawer.

Redfield's voice was cuttingly contemptuous as he said quite calmly: "You're all kinds of asses, you sheepmen. You ought to pay the fee for your cattle with secret joy. So long as you can get your stock pastured (and in effect guarded) by the Government from June to November for twenty cents, or even fifty cents, per head you're in luck. Mrs. Wetherford is right: we've all been educated in a bad school. Uncle Sam has been too bloomin' lazy to keep any supervision over his public lands. He's permitted us grass pirates to fight and lynch and burn one another on the high range (to which neither of us had any right), holding back the real

user of the land—the farmer. We've played the part of selfish and greedy gluttons so long that we fancy our privileges have turned into rights. Having grown rich on free range, you're now fighting the Forest Service because it is disposed to make you pay for what has been a gratuity. I'm a hog, Gregg, but I'm not a fool. I see the course of empire, and I'm getting into line."

Gregg was silenced, but not convinced. "It's a long lane that has no turn," he growled.

Redfield resumed, in impersonal heat. "The cow-man was conceived in anarchy and educated in murder. Whatever romantic notions I may have had of the plains twenty-five years ago, they are lost to me now. The free-range stock-owner has no country and no God; nothing but a range that isn't his, and damned bad manners—begging pardon, Miss Wetherford. The sooner he dies the better for the State. He's a dirty, wasteful sloven, content to eat canned beans and drink canned milk in his rotten bad coffee; and nobody but an old crank like myself has the grace to stand up and tell the truth about him."

Cavanagh smiled. "And you wouldn't, if you weren't a man of independent means, and known to be one of the most experienced cow-punchers in the county. I've no fight with men like Gregg; all is they've got to conform to the rules of the service."

Gregg burst out: "You think you're the whole United States army! Who gives you all the authority?"

"Congress and the President."

"There's nothing in that bill to warrant these petty tyrannies of yours."

"What you call tyrannies I call defending the public domain," replied Redfield. "If I had my way, I'd give my rangers the power of the Canadian mounted police. Is there any other State in this nation where the roping of sheep-herders and the wholesale butchery of sheep would be permitted? From the very first the public lands of this State have been a refuge for the criminal—a lawless no-man's land; but now, thanks to Roosevelt and the Chief Forester, we at least have a force of men on the spot to see that some semblance of law and order is maintained. You fellows may protest and run to Washington, and you may send your paid representatives there, but you're sure to lose. As free-range monopolists you are cumberers of the earth, and all you represent must pass, before this State can be anything but the byword it now is. I didn't feel this so keenly ten years ago, but with a bunch of children growing up my vision has grown clearer. The picturesque West must give way to the civilized West, and the war of sheepmen and cattle-men must stop."

The whole dining-room was still as he finished, and Lee Virginia, with a girl's vague comprehension of the man's world, apprehended in Redfield's speech a large and daring purpose.

Gregg sneered. "Perhaps you intend to run for Congress on that line of talk."

Redfield's voice was placid. "At any rate, I intend to represent the policy that will change this State from the

sparsely settled battle-ground of a lot of mounted hobos to a State with an honorable place among the other commonwealths. If this be treason, make the most of it."

Cavanagh was disturbed; for while he felt the truth of his chief's words, he was in doubt as to the policy of uttering them.

It was evident to Virginia that the cow-men, as well as Gregg, were nearly all against the prophet of the future, and she was filled with a sense of having arrived on the scene just as the curtain to a stern and purposeful drama was being raised. With her recollections of the savage days of old, it seemed as if Redfield, by his bold words, had placed his life in danger.

Cavanagh rose. "I must be going," he said, with a smile.

Again the pang of loss touched her heart. "When will you come again?" she asked, in a low voice.

"It is hard to say. A ranger's place is in the forest. I am very seldom in town. Just now the danger of fires is great, and I am very uneasy. I may not be down again for a month."

The table was empty now, and they were standing in comparative isolation looking into each other's eyes in silence. At last she murmured: "You've helped me. I'm going to stay—a little while, anyway, and do what I can—"

"I'm sorry I can't be of actual service, but I am a soldier with a work to do. Even if I were here, I could not help you as regards the townspeople — they all hate me quite cordially; but Redfield, and especially Mrs. Redfield,

can be of greater aid and comfort. He's quite often here, and when you are lonely and discouraged let him take you up to Elk Lodge."

"I've been working all the morning to make this room decent. It was rather fun. Don't you think it helped?"

"I saw the mark of your hand the moment I entered the door," he earnestly replied. "I'm not one that laughs at the small field of woman's work. If you make this little hotel clean and homelike, you'll be doing a very considerable work in bringing about the New West which the Supervisor is spouting about." He extended his hand, and as she took it he thrilled to the soft strength of it. "Till next time," he said, "good luck!"

She watched him go with a feeling of pain—as if in his going she were losing her best friend and most valiant protector.

IV

VIRGINIA TAKES ANOTHER MOTOR RIDE

Lee Virginia's efforts to refine the little hotel produced an amazing change in Eliza Wetherford's affairs. The dining-room swarmed with those seeking food, and as the news of the girl's beauty went out upon the range, the cowboys sought excuse to ride in and get a square meal and a glimpse of the "Queen" whose hand had witched "the old shack" into a marvel of cleanliness.

Say what you will, beauty is a sovereign appeal. These men, unspeakably profane, cruel, and obscene in their saddle-talk, were awed by the fresh linen, the burnished glass, and the well-ordered tables which they found in place of the flies, the dirt, and the disorder of aforetime. "It's worth a day's ride just to see that girl for a minute," declared one enthusiast.

They did not all use the napkins, but they enjoyed having them there beside their plates, and the subdued light, the freedom from insects impressed them almost to decorum. They entered with awe, avid for a word with "Lize Wetherford's girl." Generally they failed of so much as a glance at her, for she kept away from the dining-room at meal-time.

Lee Virginia was fully aware of this male curiosity,

and vaguely conscious of the merciless light which shone in the eyes of some of them (men like Gregg), who went about their game with the shameless directness of the brute. She had begun to understand, too, that her mother's reputation was a barrier between the better class of folk and herself; but as they came now and again to take a meal, they permitted themselves a word in her praise, which she resented. "I don't want their friendship *now*," she declared, bitterly.

As she gained courage to look about her, she began to be interested in some of her coatless, collarless boarders on account of their extraordinary history. There was Brady, the old government scout, retired on a pension, who was accustomed to sit for hours on the porch, gazing away over the northern plains—never toward the mountains—as if he watched for bear or bison, or for the files of hostile red hunters—though in reality there was nothing to see but the stage, coming and going, or a bunch of cowboys galloping into town. Nevertheless, every cloud of dust was to him diversion, and he appeared to dream, like a captive eagle, bedraggled, spiritless, but with an inner spark of memory burning deep in his dim blue eyes.

Then there was an old miner, distressingly filthy, who hobbled to his meals on feet that had been frozen into clubs. He had a little gold loaned at interest, and on this he lived in tragic parsimony. He and the old scout sat much together, usually without speech (each knew to the last word the other's stories), as if they recognized each other's utter loneliness.

Sifton, the old remittance man, had been born to a higher culture, therefore was his degradation the deeper. His poverty was due to his weakness. Virginia was especially drawn toward him by reason of his inalienable politeness and his well-chosen words. He was always the gentleman—no matter how frayed his clothing.

So far as the younger men were concerned, she saw little to admire and much to hate. They were crude and uninteresting rowdies for the most part. She was put upon her defence by their glances, and she came to dread walking along the street, so open and coarse were their words of praise. She felt dishonored by the glances which her feet drew after her, and she always walked swiftly to and from the store or the post-office.

Few of these loafers had the courage to stand on their feet and court her favor, but there was one who speedily became her chief persecutor. This was Neill Ballard, celebrated (and made impudent) by two years' travel with a Wild West show. He was tall, lean, angular, and freckled, but his horsemanship was marvellous and his skill with the rope magical. His special glory consisted in a complicated whirling of the lariat. In his hand the limp, inert cord took on life, grace, charm. It hung in the air or ran in rhythmic waves about him, rising, falling, expanding, diminishing, as if controlled by some agency other than a man's hand, and its gyrations had won much applause in the Eastern cities, where such skill is expected of the cowboys.

He had lost his engagement by reason of a drunken brawl, and he was now living with his sister, the wife of

a small rancher near by. He was vain, lazy, and unspeakably corrupt, full of open boasting of his exploits in the drinking-dens of the East. No sooner did he fix eyes upon Virginia than he marked her for his special prey. He had the depraved heart of the herder and the insolent confidence of the hoodlum, and something of this the girl perceived. She despised the other men, but she feared this one, and quite justly, for he was capable of assaulting and binding her with his rope, as he had once done with a Shoshone squaw.

The Greggs, father and son, were in open rivalry for Lee also, but in different ways. The older man, who had already been married several times, was disposed to buy her hand in what he called "honorable wedlock," but the son, at heart a libertine, approached her as one who despised the West, and who, being kept in the beastly country by duty to a parent, was ready to amuse himself at any one's expense. He had no purpose in life but to feed his body and escape toil.

There are women to whom all this warfare would have been diverting, but it was not so to Lee. Her sense of responsibility was too keen. It was both a torture and a shame. The chivalry of the plains, of which she had read so much—and which she supposed she remembered —was gone. She doubted if it had ever existed among these centaurs. Why should it inhere in ignorant, brutal plainsmen any more than in ignorant, brutal factory hands?

There came to her, now and again, gentle old ranchers —"grangers," they would be called—and shy boys from

the farms, but for the most part the men she saw embittered her, and she kept out of their sight as much as possible. Her keenest pleasures, almost her only pleasures, lay in the occasional brief visits of the ranger, as he rode in for his mail.

Lize perceived all these attacks on her daughter, and was infuriated by them. She snapped and snarled like a tigress leading her half-grown kitten through a throng of leopards. Her brows were knotted with care as well as with pain, and she incessantly urged Virginia to go back to Sulphur. "I'll send you money to pay your board till you strike a job." But to this the girl would not agree; and the business, by reason of her presence, went on increasing from day to day.

To Redfield Lize one day confessed her pain. "I ought to send for that doctor up there, but the plain truth is I'm afraid of him. I don't want to know what's the matter of me. It's his job to tell me I'm sick and I'm scared of his verdict."

"Nonsense," he replied; "you can't afford to put off getting him much longer. I'm going back to-night, but I'll be over again to-morrow. Why don't you let me bring him down? It will save you twelve dollars. And, by the way, suppose you let me take Lee Virginia home with me? She looks a bit depressed; an outing will do her good. She's taken hold here wonderfully."

"Hasn't she! But I should have sent her away the very first night. I'm getting to depend on her. I'm plumb foolish about her now—can't let her out of my sight; and yet I'm off my feed worryin' over her. Gregg

is getting dangerous—you can't fool me when it comes to men. Curse 'em, they're all alike — beasts, every cussed one of them. I won't have my girl mistreated, I tell you that! I'm not fit to be her mother, now that's the God's truth, Reddy, and this rotten little back-country cow-town is no place for her. But what can I do? She won't leave me so long as I'm sick, and every day ties her closer to me. I don't know what I'd do without her. If I'm goin' to die I want her by me when I take my drop. So you see just how I'm placed."

She looked yellow and drawn as she ended, and Redfield was moved by her unwonted tenderness.

"Now let me advise," he began, after a moment's pause. "We musn't let the girl get homesick. I'll take her home with me this afternoon, and bring her back along with a doctor to-morrow."

"All right, but before you go I want to have a private talk—I want to tell you something."

He warned her away from what promised to be a confession. "Now, now, Eliza, don't tell me anything that requires that tone of voice; I'm a bad person to keep a secret, and you might be sorry for it. I don't want to know anything more about your business than I can guess.'

"I don't mean the whiskey trade," she explained. "I've cut that all out anyway. It's something more important—it's about Ed and me."

"I don't want to hear *that* either," he declared. "Let bygones be bygones. What you did then is outlawed, anyway. Those were fierce times, and I want to forget

them." He looked about. "Let me see this Miss Virginia and convey to her Mrs. Redfield's invitation."

"She's in the kitchen, I reckon. Go right out."

He was rather glad of a chance to see the young reformer in action, and smiled as he came upon her surrounded by waiters and cooks, busily superintending the preparations for the noon meal, which amounted to a tumult each day.

She saw Redfield, nodded, and a few moments later came toward him, flushed and beaming with welcome. "I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Supervisor."

He bowed profoundly. "I'm delighted to find you well, Miss Virginia, and doubly pleased to see you in your regimentals, which you mightily adorn."

She looked down at her apron. "I made this myself. Do you know our business is increasing wonderfully? I'm busy every moment of the day till bedtime."

"Indeed I do know it. I hear of the Wetherford House all up and down the line. I was just telling your mother she'll be forced to build bigger, like the chap in the Bible."

"She works too nard. Poor mother! I try to get her to turn the cash-drawer over to me, but she won't do it. Doesn't she seem paler and weaker to you?"

"She does, indeed, and this is what I came in to propose. Mrs. Redfield sends by me a formal invitation to you to visit Elk Lodge. She is not quite able to take the long ride, else she'd come to you." Here he handed her a note. "I suggest that you go up with me this

afternoon, and to-morrow we'll fetch the doctor down to see your mother. What do you say to that?"

Her eyes were dewy with grateful appreciation of his kindness as she answered: "That would be a great pleasure, Mr. Redfield, if mother feels able to spare me."

"I've talked with her; she is anxious to have you go."

Virginia was indeed greatly pleased and pleasantly excited by this message, for she had heard much of Mrs. Redfield's exclusiveness, and also of the splendor of her establishment. She hurried away to dress with such flutter of joyous anticipation that Redfield felt quite repaid for the pressure he had put upon his wife to induce her to write that note. "You may leave Lize Wetherford out of the count, my dear," he had said. "There is nothing of her discernible in the girl. Virginia is a lady. I don't know where she got it, but she's a gentlewoman by nature."

Lize said: "Don't you figure on me in any way, Reddy. I'm nothing but the old hen that raised up this lark, and all I'm a-livin' for now is to make her happy. Just you cut me out when it comes to any question about your wife and Virginia. I'm not in their class."

It was hot and still in the town, but no sooner was the car in motion than both heat and dust were forgotten. Redfield's machine was not large, and as he was content to go at moderate speed, conversation was possible.

He was of that sunny, optimistic, ever-youthful nature which finds delight in human companionship under any conditions whatsoever. He accepted this girl for what she seemed—a fresh, unspoiled child. He saw nothing

cheap or commonplace in her, and was not disposed to impose any of her father's wild doings upon her calendar. He had his misgivings as to her future—that was the main reason why he had said to Mrs. Redfield, "The girl must be helped." Afterward he had said "sustained."

It was inevitable that the girl should soon refer to the ranger, and Redfield was as complimentary of him as she could wish. "Ross hasn't a fault but one, and that's a negative one: he doesn't care a hang about getting on, as they say over in England. He's content just to do the duty of the moment. He made a good cow-puncher and a good soldier; but as for promotion, he laughs when I mention it."

"He told me that he hoped to be Chief Forester," protested Virginia.

"Oh yes, he says that; but do you know, he'd rather be where he is, riding over the hills, than live in London. You should see his cabin some time. It's most wonderful, really. His walls are covered with bookshelves of his own manufacture, and chairs of his own design. Where the boy got the skill I don't see. Heaven knows, his sisters are conventional enough! He's capable of being Supervisor, but he won't live in town and work in an office. He's like an Indian in his love of the open."

All this was quite too absorbingly interesting to permit of any study of the landscape, which went by as if dismissed by the chariot wheels of some contemptuous magician. Redfield's eyes were mostly on the road (in the manner of the careful driver), but when he did look up

it was to admire the color and poise of his seat-mate, who made the landscape of small account.

She kept the conversation to the desired point. "Mr. Cavanagh's work interests me very much. It seems very important; and it must be new, for I never heard of a forest ranger when I was a child."

"The forester is new—at least, in America," he answered. "My dear young lady, you are returned just in the most momentous period in the history of the West. The old dominion—the cattle-range—is passing. The supremacy of the cowboy is ended. The cow-boss is raising oats, the cowboy is pitching alfalfa, and swearing horribly as he blisters his hands. Some of the rangers at the moment are men of Western training like Ross, but whose allegiance is now to Uncle Sam. With others that transfer of allegiance is not quite complete, hence the insolence of men like Gregg, who think they can bribe or intimidate these forest guards, and so obtain favors; the newer men are college-bred, real foresters. But you can't know what it all means till you see Ross, or some other ranger, on his own heath. We'll make up a little party some day and drop down upon him, and have him show us about. It's a lonely life, and so the ranger keeps open house. Would you like to go?"

"Oh, yes indeed! I'm eager to get into the mountains. Every night as I see the sun go down over them I wonder what the world is like up there."

Then he began very delicately to inquire about her Eastern experience. There was not much to tell. In a lovely old town not far from Philadelphia, where her

aunt lived, she had spent ten years of happy exile. "I was horribly lonely and homesick at first," she said. "Mother wrote only short letters, and my father never wrote at all. I didn't know he was dead then. He was always good to me. He wasn't a bad man, was he?"

"No," responded Redfield, without hesitation. "He was very like the rest of us—only a little more reckless and a little more partisan, that's all. He was a dashing horseman and a dead-shot, and so, naturally, a leader of these daredevils. He was popular with both sides of the controversy up to the very moment when he went South to lead the invaders against the rustlers."

"What was it all about? I never understood it. What were they fighting about?"

"In a sense, it was all very simple. You see, Uncle Sam, in his careless, do-nothing way, has always left his range to whomever got there first, and that was the cattle-man. At first there was grass enough for us all, but as we built sheds and corrals about watering-places we came to claim *rights* on the range. We usually secured by fraud homesteads in the sections containing water, and so, gun in hand, 'stood off' the man who came after. Gradually, after much shooting and lawing, we parcelled out the range and settled down covering practically the whole State. Our adjustments were not perfect, but our system was working smoothly for us who controlled the range. We had convinced ourselves, and pretty nearly everybody else, that the State was only fit for cattle-grazing, and that we were the

most competent grazers; furthermore, we were in possession, and no man could come in without our consent.

"However, a very curious law of our own making was our undoing. Of course the 'nester' or 'punkin roller,' as we contemptuously called the small farmer, began sifting in here and there in spite of our guns, but he was only a mosquito bite in comparison with the trouble which our cow-punchers stirred up. Perhaps you remember enough about the business to know that an unbranded yearling calf without its mother is called a maverick?"

"Yes, I remember that. It belongs to the man who finds him, and brands him."

"Precisely. Now that law worked very nicely so long as the poor cowboy was willing to catch and brand him for his employer, but it proved a 'joker' when he woke up and said to his fellows: 'Why brand these mavericks at five dollars per head for this or that outfit when the law says it belongs to the man who finds him?'"

Lee Virginia looked up brightly. "That seems right to me!"

"Ah yes; but wait. We cattle-men had large herds, and the *probabilities* were that the calf belonged to some one of us; whereas, the cowboy, having no herd at all, *knew* the maverick belonged to some one's herd. True, the law said it was his, but the law did not mean to reward the freebooter; yet that is exactly what it did. At first only a few outlaws took advantage of it; but hard

years came on, the cattle business became less and less profitable, we were forced to lay off our men, and so at last the range swarmed with idle cow-punchers; then came the breakdown in our scheme! The cowboys took to 'mavericking' on their own account. Some of them had the grace to go into partnership with some farmer, and so claim a small bunch of cows, but others suddenly and miraculously acquired herds of their own. From keeping within the law, they passed to violent methods. They slit the tongues of calves for the purpose of separating them from their mothers. Finding he could not suck, bossy would at last wander away from its dam, and so become a 'maverick.' In short, anarchy reigned on the range."

"But surely my father had nothing to do with this?"

"No; your father, up to this time, had been on good terms with everybody. He had a small herd of cattle down the river, which he owned in common with a man named Hart."

"I remember him."

"He was well thought of by all the big outfits; and when the situation became intolerable, and we got together to weed out 'the rustlers,' as these cattle-thieves were called, your father was approached and converted to a belief in drastic measures. He had suffered less than the rest of us because of his small herd and the fact that he was very popular among the cowboys. So far as I was concerned, the use of violent methods revolted me. My training in the East had made me a

respecter of the law. 'Change the law,' I said. 'The law is all right,' they replied; 'the trouble is with these rustlers. We'll hang a few of 'em, and that will break up the business.'"

Parts of this story came back to the girl's mind, producing momentary flashes of perfect recollection. She heard again the voices of excited men arguing over and over the question of "mavericking," and she saw her father as he rode up to the house that last day before he went South.

Redfield went on. "The whole plan as developed was silly, and I wonder still that Ed Wetherford, who knew 'the nester' and the cowboy so well, should have lent his aid to it. The cattle-men—some from Cheyenne, some from Denver, and a few from New York and Chicago—agreed to finance a sort of Vigilante Corps composed of men from the outside, on the understanding that this policing body should be commanded by one of their own number. Your father was chosen second in command, and was to guide the party; for he knew almost every one of the rustlers, and could ride directly to their doors."

"I wish he hadn't done that," murmured the girl.

"I must be frank with you, Virginia. I can't excuse that in him. It was a kind of treachery. He must have been warped by his associates. They convinced him by some means that it was his duty, and one fine day the Fork was startled by a messenger, who rode in to say that the cattle-barons were coming with a hundred Texas bad men 'to clean out the town,' and to put their

own men into office. This last was silly rot to me, but the people believed it."

The girl was tingling now. "I remember! I remember the men who rode into the town to give the alarm. Their horses were white with foam; their heads hung down, and their sides went in and out. I pitied the poor things. Mother jumped on her pony, and rode out among the men. She wanted to go with them, but they wouldn't let her. I was scared almost breathless."

"I was in Sulphur City, and did not hear of it till it was nearly all over," Redfield resumed, his speech showing a little of the excitement which thrilled through the girl's voice. "Well, the first act of vengeance was so ill-considered that it practically ended the whole campaign. The invaders fell upon and killed two ranchers—one of whom was probably not a rustler at all, but a peaceable settler, and the other one they most barbarously hanged. More than this, they attacked and vainly tried to kill two settlers whom they met on the road—German farmers, with no connection, so far as known, with the thieves. These men escaped, and gave the alarm. In a few hours the whole range was aflame with vengeful fire. The Forks, as you may recall, was like a swarm of bumblebees. Every man and boy was armed and mounted. The storekeepers distributed guns and ammunition, leaders developed, and the embattled 'punkin rollers,' rustlers, and townsmen rode out to meet the invaders."

The girl paled with memory of it. "It was terrible! I went all day without eating, and for two nights we were all too excited to sleep. It seemed as if the world

were coming to an end. Mother cried because they wouldn't let her go with them. She didn't know father was leading the other army."

"She must have known soon, for it was reported that your father was among them. She certainly knew when they were driven to earth in that log fort, for they were obliged to restrain her by force from going to your father. As I run over those furious days it all seems incredible, like a sudden reversal to barbarism."

"How did it all end? The soldiers came, didn't they?"

"Yes; the long arm of Uncle Sam reached out and took hold upon the necks of both parties. I guess your father and his band would have died right there had not the regular army interfered. It only required a sergeant wearing Uncle Sam's uniform to come among those armed and furious cowboys and remove their prisoners."

"I saw that. It was very strange—that sergeant was so young and so brave."

He turned and smiled at her. "Do you know who that was?"

Her eyes flashed. She drew her breath with a gasp. "Was it Mr. Cavanagh?"

"Yes, it was Ross. He was serving in the regular army at the time. He has told me since that he felt no fear whatever. 'Uncle Sam's blue coat was like Siegfried's magic armor,' he said; 'it was the kind of thing the mounted police of Canada had been called upon to do many a time, and I went in and got my men.' That ended the war, so far as violent measures went, and it really ended the sovereignty of the cattle-man. The

power of the 'nester' has steadily increased from that moment."

"But my father—what became of him? They took him away to the East, and that is all I ever knew. What do you think became of him?"

"I could never make up my mind. All sorts of rumors come to us concerning him. As a matter of fact, the State authorities sympathized with the cattle-barons, and my own opinion is that your father was permitted to escape. He was afterward seen in Texas, and later it was reported that he had been killed there."

The girl sat still, listening to the tireless whir of the machine, and looking out at the purpling range with tear-mist eyes. At last she said: "I shall never think of my father as a bad man, he was always so gentle to me."

"You need not condemn him, my dear young lady. First of all, it's not fair to bring him (as he was in those days) forward into these piping times of dairy cows and alfalfa. The people of the Forks—some of them, at least—consider him a traitor, and regard you as the daughter of a renegade, but what does it matter? Each year sees the Old West diminish, and already, in the work of the Forest Service, law and order advance. Notwithstanding all the shouting of herders and the beating to death of sheep, no hostile shot has ever been fired within the bounds of a National Forest. In the work of the forest rangers lies the hope of ultimate peace and order over all the public lands."

The girl fell silent again, her mind filled with larger

conceptions of life than her judgment had hitherto been called upon to meet. She knew that Redfield was right, and yet that world of the past—the world of the swift herdsman and his trampling, long-horned, half-wild kine still appealed to her imagination. The West of her girlhood seemed heroic in memory; even the quiet account of it to which she had just listened could not conceal its epic largeness of movement. The part which troubled her most was her father's treachery to his neighbors. That he should fight, that he should kill men in honorable warfare, she could understand; but not his recreancy, his desertion of her mother and herself.

She came back to dwell at last on the action of that slim young soldier who had calmly ridden through the infuriated mob. She remembered that she had thrilled even then at the vague and impersonal power which he represented. To her childish mind he seemed to bear a charm, like the heroes of her story-books—something which made him invulnerable.

After a long pause Redfield spoke again. "The memory of your father will make life for a time a bit hard for you in Roaring Fork—perhaps your mother's advice is sound. Why not come to Sulphur City, which is almost entirely of the new spirit?"

"If I can get my mother to come, too, I will be glad to do so, for I hate the Fork; but I will not leave her there, sick and alone."

"Much depends upon the doctor's examination tomorrow."

They had topped the divide now between the Fork

and Sulphur Creek Basin, and the green fields, the alfalfa meadows, and the painted farm-houses thickened beneath them. Strange how significant all these signs were now. A few days ago they had appeared doubtful improvements, now they represented the oncoming dominion of the East. They meant cleanliness and decent speech, good bread and sweet butter. Ultimately houses with hot water in their bath-rooms and pianos in their parlors would displace the shack, the hitching-pole, and the dog-run, and in those days Edward Wetherford would be forgotten.

Redfield swept through the town, then turned up the stream directly toward the high wall of the range, which was ragged and abrupt at this point. They passed several charming farm-houses, and the western sky grew ever more glorious with its plum-color and saffron, and the range reasserted its mastery over the girl. At last they came to the very jaws of the canon; and there, in a deep natural grove of lofty cottonwood-trees, Redfield passed before a high rustic gate which marked the beginning of his estate. The driveway was of gravel, and the intermingling of transplanted shrubs and pine-trees showed the care of the professional gardener.

The house was far from being a castle; indeed, it was very like a house in Bryn-Mawr, except that it was built entirely of half-hewn logs, with a wide projecting roof. Giant hydrangeas and other flowering shrubs bordered the drive, and on the rustic terrace a lady in white was waiting.

Redfield slowed down, and scrambled ungracefully

out; but his voice was charming as he said: "Eleanor, this it Miss Wetherford. She was on the point of getting the blues, so I brought her away," he explained.

Mrs. Redfield, quite as urban as the house, was a slim little woman of delicate habit, very far from the ordinary conception of a rancher's wife. Her manner was politely considerate, but not heatedly cordial (the visitor was not precisely hers), and though she warmed a little after looking into Virginia's face, she could not by any stretch of phrase be called cordial.

"Are you tired? would you like to lie down before dinner?" she asked.

"Oh no, indeed. Nothing ever tires me," Virginia responded, with a smile.

"You look like one in perfect health," continued her hostess, in the envious tone of one who knew all too well what ill-health meant. "Let me show you to your room."

The house was not precisely the palace the cowboy had reported it to be, but it was charmingly decorated, and the furnishings were tasteful. To the girl it was as if she had been transported with instant magic from the horrible little cow-town back to the home of one of her dearest friends in Chester. She was at once exalted and humbly grateful.

"We dine at seven," Mrs. Redfield was saying, "so you can take a cup of tea without spoiling your dinner. Will you venture it?"

"If you please."

"Very well; come down soon, and I'll have it ready. Mr. Redfield, I'm sure, will want some."

Virginia's heart was dancing with delight of this home as she came down the stairs a little later. She found Mr. Redfield at the farther end of a long sitting-room, whose dim light was as restful (after the glare of the tawny plains) as the voice of her hostess was to her ears, which still ached with the noise of profane and vulgar speech.

Redfield heard her coming and met her half-way, and with stately ceremony showed her a seat. "I fear you will need something stronger than tea after my exhausting conversation."

"I hope, Hugh, you were not in one of your talking moods?"

"I was, Eleanor. I talked incessantly, barring an occasional jolt of the machine."

"You poor thing!" This to Virginia. "Truly you deserve a two hours' rest before dinner, for our dinner is always a talk-fest, and to-night, with Senator Bridges here, it will be a convention."

He turned to Virginia. "We were talking old times 'before the war,' and you know it never tires veterans to run over their ancient campaigns—does it, Lee Virginia?"

As they talked Mrs. Redfield studied the girl with increasing interest and favor, and soon got at her point of view. She even secured a little more of her story, which matched fairly well with the account her husband had given. Her prejudices were swept away, and she treated her young guest as one well-born and well-educated woman treats another.

At last she said: "We dress for dinner, but any frock

you have will do. We are not ironclad in our rules. There will be some neighbors in, but it isn't in any sense a 'party.'"

Lee Virginia went to her room, borne high upon a new conception of the possibilities of the West. It was glorious to think that one could enjoy the refinement, the comfort of the East at the same time that one dwelt within the inspiring shadow of the range. She caught some prophetic hint in all this of the future age when each of these foot-hills would be peopled by those to whom cleanliness of mind and grace of body were habitual. Standing on the little balcony which filled the front of her windows, she looked away at the towering heights, smoky purple against a sky of burning gold, and her eyes expanded like those of the young eagle when about to launch himself upon the sunset wind.

The roar of a waterfall came to her ears, and afar on the sage-green carpet of the lower mesa a horseman was galloping swiftly. Far to the left of this smoothly sculptured table-land a band of cattle fed, while under her eyes, formal as a suburban home, lay a garden of old-fashioned English flowers. It was a singular and moving union of the old and new—the East and the West.

On her table and on the pretty bookshelves she found several of the latest volumes of poetry and essays, and the bed, with its dainty covering and ample spread, testified quite as plainly of taste and comfort. Her hands were a-tremble as she put on the bright muslin gown which was all she had for evening wear. She felt very much like the school-girl again, and after she

had done her best to look nice, she took a seat in the little rocker, with intent to compose herself for her meeting with strangers. "I wish we were dining without visitors," she said, as she heard a carriage drive up. A little later a galloping horse entered the yard and stopped at the door.

"It all sounds like a play," she said to herself, forgetting for the moment that she was miles away from a town and in a lonely ranch-house under the very shadows of the mountains.

She heard voices in the hall, and among them one with a very English accent—one that sounded precisely like those she had heard on the stage. It was the voice of a man, big, hearty, with that thick, throaty gurgle which is so suggestive of London that one is certain to find a tweed suit and riding-breeches associated with it.

At last she dared wait no longer, and taking courage from necessity, descended the stairs—a pleasant picture of vigorous yet somewhat subdued maidenhood.

V

TWO ON THE VERANDA

REDFIELD met his young guest in dinner-coat, looking extremely urban, and presented his "friend and neighbor, Mr. Enderby."

Enderby turned out to be the owner of the voice with the English accent which Lee Virginia had heard in the hall, but he was very nice, and a moment later Mrs. Redfield entered with Mrs. Enderby, a large lady with a smiling face. Then a voice she knew spoke from behind her: "I don't need a presentation. Miss Wetherford and I have already met."

She turned to meet Ross Cavanagh, the young ranger.

"How did you get here?" she asked, in wonder.

"I rode across the hills; it's not far."

He too was in evening dress, and as she stared at him in surprise he laughingly protested. "Please don't scrutinize this coat too closely. It's the only one I've owned for ten years, and this is the only house in which I'd *dare* to wear it."

Bridges (who turned out to be a State senator) was a farmer-like elderly man wearing a badly fitting serge suit. He was markedly Western; so was his wife, who looked rather uneasy and hot.

It was all delightfully exciting to Lee Virginia, and to be taken in to dinner by the transfigured ranger completed her appreciation of the charming home and its refined hostess.

Redfield shone as host, presenting an admirable mixture of clubman and Western rancher. His natural sense of humor, sharpened by twenty years of plains life, was Western. His manner, his habits of dress, of dining, of taking wine, were uncorruptedly Manhattan. Enderby, large, high-colored, was naturally a bit of what we know as the "haw-haw type" of Englishman—a thoroughly good fellow, kindly, tolerant, brave, and generous, who could not possibly change his spots. He had failed utterly to acquire the American idiom, and his attempts at cowboy slang were often amusing—especially to Redfield, who prided himself on being quite undistinguishable in a cow-camp.

Virginia and Ross, being the only young folk at the table, were seated together, and Enderby remarked privately: "Ross, you're in luck."

"I know I am," he replied, heartily.

He was (as Redfield had said) highly susceptible, made so by his solitary life in the mountains, and to be seated close beside this maid of the valley stirred his blood to the danger-point. It was only by an effort of the will that he kept in touch with Redfield's remarks.

"Enderby never can grow accustomed to his democratic neighbors," Redfield was saying. "He's been here six years, and yet when one of his cowboy friends tells him to 'go to hell' he's surprised and a bit offended."

"Oh, it isn't that," explained Mrs. Enderby; "it's to have your maids say 'All right' when you ask them to remove the soup. It's a bit shocking also to have your cook or housemaid going about the house singing some wretched ditty. What was that one, Charley, that Irma Maud sang till we were nearly wild (Irma Maud was my chambermaid). What was it? Something about 'Tixey Ann.'"

"Oh, I know it perfectly!" exclaimed Enderby. "'If you want to make a niggah feel good—'"

"No, no; that's another one."

Redfield interposed. "You wouldn't have them go about in sullen stealth, would you? Think how song lightens their drudgery."

"Ah yes; but if it drives the family out-of-doors?"

"It shouldn't. You should take it all as a part of the happy world of democracy wherein even the maid-servant sings at her toil."

"But our democratic neighbors are all the time coming to look round the place. We've no privacy whatever. On Sunday afternoon they drive through the grounds in procession; you'd think our place a public park and we the keepers."

In all this banter Virginia was given the English viewpoint as to Western manners and conditions. She perceived that the Enderbys, notwithstanding their heavy-set prejudices, were persons of discernment and right feeling. It certainly was impertinent of the neighbors to ride through the grounds as if they were public, and Mrs. Enderby was justified in resenting it.

Ross turned to her. "Enderby is the kind of Englishman who wants to adapt himself to new conditions, but can't."

"You don't seem like an Englishman at all."

"Well, I was caught young, and, besides, I'm really Irish—on my father's side."

"Oh, that's different!" she exclaimed, as though that somehow brought him nearer to her own people.

"It is, isn't it?" he laughingly agreed. "But Enderby —I suppose his pedigree goes back to Cedric and his swineherds. You can't change that kind."

"I hadn't the least thought of seeing you here. How did you happen to come?"

"Redfield telephoned me at the mill, and I came at once. I haven't been here since May, and I just thought I'd take a half a day off. Luckily, my understudy was with me. I left him 'on the job.'"

He did not tell her that she was the principal reason for this sudden descent upon Elk Lodge, and no one but Redfield knew the killing ride he had taken in order to be in at the beginning of the dinner. The girl's face and voice, especially her voice, had been with him night and day as he went about his solitary duties. Her life problem had come to fill his mind to a disturbing degree, and he was eager to know more of her and of her struggle against the vice and vulgarity of the Forks.

"How is your mother?" he asked, a few minutes later.

"Not at all well. Mr. Redfield is to take the doctor back with us to-morrow." The ecstasy died out of her

face, and the flexible lips drooped with troubled musing. "I am afraid she suffers more than she will admit."

"She needs a rest and change. She should get away from her seat at that cash-register, and return to the open air. A touch of camp-life would help her. She sticks too close to her work."

"I know she does, but she won't let me relieve her, even for an hour. It isn't because she doesn't trust me; she says it's because she doesn't want me sitting there—so—publicly. She doesn't oppose my housekeeping any more—"

"You certainly have made the old hotel into a place of miraculous neatness."

She flushed with pleasure. "I have done something, but not as I'd like to do. I really think if mother wishes to sell she could do so now to much better advantage."

"I've no doubt of it. Really, I'm not being funny, Miss Wetherford, when I say you've done something heroic. It's no easy thing to come into a place like that and make it habitable. It shows immense courage and self-reliance on your part. It's precisely the kind of work this whole country needs."

His praise, sincere and generous, repaid her for all she had gone through. It was a great pleasure to hear her small self praised for courage and self-reliance by one whose daily work was heroic. All things conspired to make a conquest of her heart, for the ranger bore himself with grace, and dealt with his silver deftly. His face, seen from the side, was older and sterner than she had thought it, but it was very attractive in line.

She said: "Mr. Redfield and I were talking of 'the war' to-day—I mean our 'cattle-man's invasion'—and I learned that you were the sergeant who came for the prisoners."

He smiled. "Yes; I was serving in the regular army at that time."

"You must have been very young?"

"I was—a kid."

"That was a brave thing to do."

"Not at all. I was a soldier under orders of the commander of the post. I dared not disobey."

She would not have it so. "But you knew that you were going into danger?"

"To be honest about it, I did; but I relied on my blue coat to protect me."

"It was a terrible time. I was only a child, but I can remember how wild the men all seemed when you drove up and leaped out of the wagon. I didn't realize that my father's life depended on your coming, but we all knew it was brave of you."

"I think I was born a soldier. What I like about my present job is its definiteness. I have my written instructions, and there's no need to argue anything. I carry out my orders. But I beg pardon, I'm not going to talk 'shop' to you. I want you to tell me about yourself. I hope you are not to return to the East, for if you do not I shall be able to see you occasionally."

Here Redfield appealed to the ranger. "Ross, you're all sorts of a reactionary. What do you say to this?

Senator Bridges is opposed to all Federal interference with State forests and State game."

The forester's eyes lit up. "But are they State forests and State game? What makes them so? They are lands which the whole people purchased and which the whole people defended."

"Heah! heah!" cheered Enderby.

Bridges bristled with anger, and went off into a long harangue on States rights and the dangers of centralization, to which Enderby replied: "Bosh! the whole trouble with your bally Government is its lack of cohesion. If I had my way, I'd wipe out the Senate and put a strong man like Roosevelt at the head of the executive. You're such blooming asses over here; you don't know enough to keep a really big man in your presidential chair. This fussing about every four years to put in some oily corporation lawyer is bloody rot. Here's Roosevelt gets in the midst of a lot of the finest kind of reforms, y' know, and directly you go and turn him out! Then if you get a bad man, you've to wait four years till you can fetch him a whack. Why not arrange it so you can pitch your President out the minute he goes wrong? I say your old rag of a Constitution is a ball-and-chain on your national leg. England is immeasurably better off so far as that goes."

Ross turned to Virginia, leaving the political discussion to go on over his head. "I was back in the Old Island a couple of years ago, and you've no idea how small it seemed to me. It surely is a 'right little, tight little island.' I couldn't help wondering whether the men

in Parliament were as important as they seemed to think they were, and whether England is not really an empty shell of empire, a memory of what it once was. I couldn't settle down there, someway. I was homesick for the mountains in a month. But what scared me most was the pauper population of the old place—one in every thirty-seven must be helped. I came back to the States gladly. 'I guess I'm an American,' I said to my sisters."

To Lee Virginia all this talk of "the curse of democracy" and "the decay of empire" was unexciting, but when Cavanagh told of the sheepmen's advance across the dead-line on Deer Creek, and of the threats of the cattle-owners, she was better able to follow the discussion. Bridges was heartily on the side of law and order, for he wished to boom the State (being a heavy owner in a town-site), but he objected to Redfield's ideas of "bottling up the resources of the State."

"We're not," retorted Redfield; "we're merely defending them against those who would monopolize them. We believe in their fullest use, but we see no reason for giving away the resources when the country needs the revenue."

Mrs. Redfield rose as soon as the coffee came on. "You gentlemen seem bent upon discussing matters of no interest to us," she said, "so we'll leave you to fight it out alone. I'm sure you'll all agree with Hugh in the end. Like General Grant, he's a very obstinate man."

No sooner were they seated in the big living-room than Mrs. Enderby began to relate comical stories of her

household. Her cats had fits and ran up the wall. Her dogs were forever getting quilled by reason of foolish attacks upon porcupines, or else they came home so reminiscent of skunks that they all but smothered the cook. "Invariably they return from encounters of this kind just as we are sitting at dinner," she explained. "Furthermore, Enderby's ditches are habitually getting clogged, and overflowing the lawn and filling the cellar, and he stands in terror of his cowboys. When I think of all these irruptions and distractions, England's order and routine seem heavenly; but Charley finds all this amusing, more's the pity, and leaves me to set things in order. Most ludicrous of all, to me, is his habitual claim that the ranch is paying. I tell him there's an error in his bookkeeping somewhere, but he assures me that his receipts exceeded his expenditures last year—which is quite too incredible. You've no idea how high wages are and how little we raise."

"Oh yes, I have," laughed Mrs. Redfield, "and my cat had a fit too. Hugh says it's the high altitude. I tell him it's melancholia."

Cavanagh showed himself. "I hear so much laughter I'm coming in, we're all so insufferably political out here. And, besides, I came to see the ladies, and I can only stay a few minutes longer."

"You're not going back to-night!" exclaimed his hostess.

"I must be on my own precinct by daylight," he replied; "the Supervisor has an eye on me."

Mrs. Redfield explained to Lee Virginia. "He rode fifty miles over the mountains—"

"Thirty," corrected Ross. "But what does that matter when I'm in the company of such charming ladies?" he added, gallantly.

"And now he's going to ride all the way back to-night!"

"Think of that," gasped Mrs. Enderby, "and no moon!"

"How can you find your way?" asked Mrs. Bridges, to whom this was a mortally dangersome journey.

"Oh, it's quite simple. If you don't bump against a tree or fall into the creek you may be quite sure you're on the trail," laughed Ross.

Mrs. Redfield knew the true reason for his coming, and was not at all pleased, "for with all Lee's personal charm," she said to her husband, "she is socially beneath Ross Cavanagh, even in a State where social barriers are few."

"Come out on the veranda," suggested Cavanagh, "and I'll show you the hills I must climb."

Lee accepted innocently; but as the young people left the room Mrs. Enderby looked at her hostess with significant glance. "There's the lady Ross rode down to meet. Who is she?"

"Her mother is that dreadful old creature that keeps the Wetherford Hotel in Roaring Fork."

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Enderby.

"Yes; Lee Virginia is Lize Wetherford's daughter."

"But the girl is charming."

"I cannot understand it. Hugh came home a week or so ago full of her praise—" And at this point her voice dropped lower and the other drew closer.

Outside, the young people stood in silence. There was no moon, and the mountains rose darkly, a sheer wall at the end of the garden, their tops cutting into the starry sky with a dull edge, over which a dim white cone peered.

"That snow-peak is Wolftooth, and thirty miles from here, and at the head of my 'beat,'" said the ranger, after a pause, as they leaned against the railing and looked away to the south. "I go up that ridge which you see faintly at the left of the main canon, and through that deep notch which is above timber-line."

The girl's eyes widened with awe of the big, silent, dark world he indicated. "Aren't you afraid to start out on such a trip alone—I mean, don't you dread it?"

"I'll be sorry to start back, yes, but not because of the dark. I've enjoyed my visit here so much it will be hard to say good-night."

"It seems strange to me that you should prefer this wild country to England."

"Do you like the East better than the West?"

"In some ways; but then, you see, I was born out here."

"So was I—I mean to say I was regenerated out here. The truth is I was a good deal of a scapegrace when I left England. I was always for hunting and horses, and naturally I came directly to the wild West country, and here I've been ever since. I've had my turn at each phase of it—cow-puncher, soldier, Rough-rider, and finally forest ranger. I reckon I've found my job at last."

"Do you like it so much?"

"At the present time I am perfectly contented. I'm

associated now with a country that will never yield to the plough—yes, I like my work. I love the forests and the streams. I wish I might show them to you. You don't know how beautiful they are. The most beautiful parks in the world are commonplace to what I can show you. My only sorrow is to think of them given over to the sawmill. Perhaps you and your mother will come up some time, and let me show you my lakes and streams. There are waters so lovely they make the heart ache. Hugh is planning to come up soon; perhaps you and Mrs. Redfield will come with him."

"I'd like it above everything," she responded, fervently. Then her voice changed: "But all depends on my mother's health."

It hurt him to hear her call Eliza Wetherford mother. He wanted to forget her origin for the moment. He was not in love with her—far from it! But she was so alluring, and the proprietress of the Wetherford House was not nice, and that made one doubt the daughter.

She broke the silence. "It seems dreadfully dark and mysterious up there." She indicated his path.

"It isn't as bad as it looks. There is a good trail, and my pony knows it as well as I do. I enjoy riding by night."

"But there are bears and other wild things, are there not?"

"Not as many as I wish there were."

"Why do you say that?"

"I hate to see all the wild life killed off. Some day all these forests will have game refuges like the Yellow-

stone National Park. They are coming each year to have greater and greater value to the people of the plains. They are playgrounds, like the Alps. Campers are coming into my valley every day, and, while they increase the danger of fires, I welcome them. They are all advocates of the forest. As one man said: 'The mountains supplement the plains. They give color and charm to the otherwise monotonous West.' I confess I couldn't live on the prairies—not even on the plains—if out of sight of the mountains. If I should ever settle down to a home it would be in a canon like this, with a great peak at my front door."

"It *is* beautiful," the girl said, in the tone of sadness with which we confront the perfect night, the perfect flower, the flawless landscape. "It is both grand and peaceful."

This tone of sadness pleased him. It showed her depth of perception, and he reflected that she had not uttered a vacuous or silly phrase since their first meeting. "She is capable of great development," he thought. Aloud he said: "You are a strange mingling of East and West. Do you realize it?"

"In what way?" she asked, feeling something ardent in his tone.

"You typify to me at this moment this whole State. You fill me with enthusiasm for its future. Here you are, derived from the lawless West, yet taking on the culture and restraint of the East so readily that you seem not in the least related to—"

He checked himself at this point, and she said:

"My mother is not as rough as she seems, Mr. Cavanagh."

"She must be more of the woman than appears, or she could not have borne such a daughter. But do you feel your relationship to her? Tell me honestly, for you interest me."

"I didn't at first, but I do now. I begin to understand her, and, besides, I feel in myself certain things that are in her, though I think I am more like the Wetherfords. My father's family home was in Maryland."

Ross could have talked on all night, so alluring was the girl's dimly-seen yet warmly-felt figure at his side, but a sense of danger and a knowledge that he should be riding led him at last to say: "It is getting chill, we must go in; but before we do so, let me say how much I've enjoyed seeing you again. I hope the doctor will make favorable report on your mother's case. You'll write me the result of the examination, won't you?"

"If you wish me to."

"I shall be most anxious to know."

They were standing very near to each other at the moment, and the ranger, made very sensitive to woman's charm by his lonely life, shook with newly-created love of her. A suspicion, a hope that beneath her cultivated manner lay the passionate nature of her mother gave an added force to his desire. He was sorely tempted to touch her, to test her; but her sweet voice, a little sad and perfectly unconscious of evil, calmed him. She said:

"I hope to persuade my mother to leave the Forks. All the best people there are against us. Some of them

have been very cruel to her and to me, and, besides, I despise and fear the men who come to our table."

"You must not exchange words with them," he all but commanded. "Beware of Gregg; he is a vile lot; do not trust him for an instant. Do not permit any of those loafers to talk with you, for if you do they will go away to defame you. I know them. They are unspeakably vile. It makes me angry to think that Gregg and his like have the right to speak to you every day while I can only see you at long intervals."

His heat betrayed the sense of proprietorship which he had begun to feel, in spite of his resolution. But the girl only perceived his solicitation, his friendly interest, and she answered: "I keep away from them all I can."

"You are right to distrust them," he replied, grimly. "Because old Sam has money, he thinks he can do as he pleases. You must be especially careful of him."

"The worst is when I go on the street; but if mother does not sell the business, I shall be obliged to stay in the Fork, no matter how I hate it."

"I wish my station were not so far away," he mused, darkly. "But I'll ride down as often as my duties will permit, and you must let me know how things go. And if any of those fellows persecute you, you'll tell me, won't you? I wish you'd look upon me as your big brother. Will you do that?" His voice entreated, and as she remained silent, he continued: "Roaring Fork is one of the worst towns in the State, and a girl like you needs some one as a protector. I don't know just how to put it so that you will not misunderstand me, but, you see, I pro-

tect the forest, the streams, and the game; I help the settler in time of trouble; I am a kind of all-round big brother to everybody who needs help in the forest. In fact, I'm paid for protecting things that can't protect themselves, and so"—here he tried to lend his voice the accent of humor—"why shouldn't I be the protector of a girl like you, alone—worse than alone—in this little cow-town?"

She remained dumb at one or two points where he clearly hoped for a word, and she was unable to thank him when he had finished. In this silence a curious constriction came into his throat. It was almost as if he had put his passion into definite words, and as the light fell upon her he perceived that her bosom was heaving with deep emotion.

"I *am* lonely," she faltered out at last—"horribly lonely; and I know now how people feel toward my mother, and it hurts me—it all hurts me; but I'm going to stay and help her—" She paused to recover her voice. "And you *do* seem different! I—I—trust you!"

"I'm glad you understand me, and you *will* let me know if I can help you, won't you?"

"Yes," she answered, simply.

"Good-night," he said, extending his hand.

She placed her palm to his quite frankly, but the touch of it made further speech at the moment impossible.

They went in with such tell-tale faces that even Redfield wondered what had passed between them.

Excusing himself almost at once, Cavanagh left the room, and when he looked in, a few moments later, he was clothed in the ranger's dusty green uniform, booted and spurred for his long, hard ride. Mrs. Redfield followed him into the hall and out on the door-stone to say: "Ross, you must be careful. This girl is very alluring in herself, but her mother, you know, is impossible."

"You're needlessly alarmed, as usual," he smilingly replied. "She interests me—that's patent; but beyond that, why—nonsense! Good-night."

Nevertheless, despite his protestations, he went away up the trail with his mind so filled with Lee Virginia's appealing face and form that he would certainly have ridden over a precipice had it not been for his experienced pony, who had fortunately but one aim, and that was to cross the range safely and to reach the home pasture at the earliest moment.

Now that he was looking back upon three hours more of Lee's society, Cavanagh was ready to admit that he had left his range and ridden hard and far with that one purpose in mind. He had been hungry for the sight of her, and now that he had touched her hand and looked upon her again he was a little surprised and deeply disturbed to find himself hungrier than before.

VI

THE VOICE FROM THE HEIGHTS

Lee Virginia was not entirely without experience as regards respectful courtship. Her life in the East had brought her to know a number of attractive lads and a few men, but none of these had become more than good companions, or friends; and though she wrote to one or two of these youths letters of the utmost friendliness, there was no passion in them, and she felt, as yet, the sting of nothing more intense in her liking for Cavanagh; but he meant more to her, now that she was lonely and beleaguered of those whose eyes were cruel and hot.

Then, too, he had come to represent a new world to her—this world of the forest, this region toward the sunset, which was quite as mysterious to her thinking as it was to the eyes of any plains-dweller. Her imagination went with the ranger on his solitary march into those vague, up-billowing masses of rocks and trees. To her there were many dangers, and she wondered at his courage, his hardihood.

That he had ridden all that long, rough way merely to see her she was not vain enough to believe; but she had, nevertheless, something of every woman's secret belief in her individual charm. Cavanagh had shown

a flattering interest in her, and his wish to be her protector filled her with joy and confidence.

She heard a good deal more about this particular forest ranger next morning at breakfast. "He is throwing himself away," Mrs. Redfield passionately declared. "Think of a man of Ross's refinement living in a mountain shack miles from anybody, watching poachers, marking trees, and cooking his own food. It's a shameful waste of genius."

"That's as you look at it, my dear," responded Redfield. "Ross is the guardian of an immense treasure-chest which belongs to the nation. Furthermore, he is quite certain—as I am—that this Forest Service is the policy of the future, and that it offers fine chances for promotion—and then, finally, he likes it."

"That is all well enough for a young man; but Ross is at least thirty-five, and should be thinking of settling down. I can't understand his point of view."

"My dear, you have never seen the procession of the seasons from such a point of view as that which he enjoys."

"No, and I do not care to. It is quite lonely enough for me right here."

Redfield looked at Lee with comic blankness. "Mrs. Redfield is hopelessly urban. As the wife of a forest supervisor, she cares more for pavements and tramcars than for the most splendid mountain park."

"I most certainly do," his wife vigorously agreed. "And if I had my way we should be living in London."

"Listen to that! She's ten times more English than Mrs. Enderby."

"I'm not; but I long for the civilized instead of the wild. I like comfort and society."

"So do I," returned he.

"Yes; the comfort of an easy-chair on the porch and the society of your forest rangers. This ranch life is all very well for a summer outing, but to be tied down here all the year round is to be denied one's birthright as a modern."

All this more or less cheerful complaint expressed the minds of many others who live amid these superb scenes. When autumn comes, when the sky is gray and the peaks are hid in mist, they long for the music, the lights, the comfort of the city; but when the April sun begins to go down in a smother of crimson and flame, and the mountains loom with epic dignity, or when at dawn the air is like some divine flood descending from the unstained mysterious heights, then the dweller in the foot-hills cries out: "How fortunate we are! Here is health and happiness! Here poverty is unknown!" One side of the girl was of this strain, the other was of the character described by her hostess. She began to see that Ross Cavanagh was fitted for higher duties than those of forest guard.

Mrs. Redfield was becoming more and more interested in this child, who had not merely the malodorous reputation of her mother to contend with, but the memory of a traitorous sire to live down; and when Lee Virginia went to her room to pack her bag, the wife turned to her

husband and said: "What are we to think of heredity when we see a thoroughly nice girl like that rise out of the union of a desperado with a vixen?"

Redfield answered: "It is unaccountable. I knew her father well; he was a reckless daredevil, with less real courage in him than there is in old Lize; but I can't tell the girl that. She is sufficiently humiliated by her mother; she takes comfort in the thought that her father at least was brave and heroic."

"I don't believe in heredity as I did once," his wife resumed. "Aren't scientific men rather divided about it?"

"Yes, there are those who deny that there is any inheritance of the spirit, of character, insisting that the laws of transmission affect the body only. Lee is certainly like her father in looks. He was a handsome rascal."

"Ross is terribly smitten with her."

Redfield coughed, uneasily. "I hope not. Of course he admires her, as any man must. She's physically attractive, very attractive, and, besides, Ross is as susceptible as a cow-puncher. He was deeply impressed the first time he saw her, I could see that."

"I didn't like his going out on the veranda with her last night," continued Mrs. Redfield, "and when they came in her eyes and color indicated that he'd been saying something exciting to her. Hugh, Ross Cavanagh must not get involved with that girl. It's your duty as his superior to warn him."

"He's fully grown, my dear, and a bit dictatorial on

his own part. I'm a trifle timid about cutting in on his private affairs."

"Then I'll do it. Marriage with a girl like that is out of the question. Think what his sisters would say."

Redfield smiled a bit satirically. "To the outsider a forest ranger at $900 a year and find himself and horses is not what you may call a brilliant catch."

"Oh, well, the outsider is no judge. Ross Cavanagh is a gentleman, and, besides, he's sure to be promoted. I acknowledge the girl's charms, and I don't understand it. When I think of her objectively as Lize Wetherford's girl I wonder at her being in my house. When I *see* her I want her to stay with me; I want to hug her."

"Perhaps we've been unjust to Lize all along," suggested Redfield. "She has remained faithful to Ed Wetherford's memory all these years—that is conceded. Doesn't that argue some unusual quality? How many women do we know who are capable of such loyalty? Come, now! Lize is a rough piece of goods, I'll admit, and her fly-bit lunch-counter was a public nuisance; but she had the courage to send her girl away to be educated, denying herself the joy of seeing her develop by her side. We mustn't permit our prejudices to run away with us."

The girl's return put a stop to the discussion, which could end in nothing but confusion anyway.

Lee Virginia said good-bye to Mrs. Redfield with grateful appreciation of her kindness, and especially of her invitation to come again, and the tears in her

eyes profoundly affected the older woman, who, with a friendliness which was something more than politeness, invited her to come again. "Whenever Roaring Fork gets on your nerves we'll be very glad to rescue you," she said in parting.

Hugh Redfield the girl thoroughly understood and loved, he was so simple-hearted and so loyal. His bitter criticisms of the West were not uttered in a destructive mood—quite the contrary. His work was constructive in the highest degree. He was profoundly impatient of America's shortcomings, for the reason that he deeply felt her responsibility to the rest of the world. His knowledge of other republics and "limited monarchies" gave his suggestions power and penetration; and even Bridges, besotted in his provincial selfishness, had advised his selection as Supervisor. Of his own fitness for the work, Redfield himself took a dispassionate view. "I am only filling the place till the right man comes along," he said to his friends. "The man before me was a half-hearted and shifty advocate. I am an enthusiast without special training; by-and-by the real forester will come to take my place."

On the way to the office, he said to Lee: "I will talk to the doctor if you like."

"I wish you would," she responded, fervently.

She remained in the machine while he went in, and as she sat there a train passed on its downward eastward run, and a feeling of loneliness, of helplessness, filled her heart. She had written many brave letters to her Eastern friends, but the vital contests, the important factors of

her life, she had not mentioned. She had given no hint of her mother's physical and moral degeneration, and she had set down no word of her longing to return; but now that she was within sight of the railway the call of the East, the temptation to escape all her discomforts, was almost great enough to carry her away; but into her mind came the thought of the ranger riding his solitary way, and she turned her face to her own duties once more, comforted by the words of praise he had spoken and by the blaze of admiration in his eyes.

Redfield came out, followed by a small man carrying a neat bag. He was of surpassing ugliness, and yet she liked him. His mouth had a curious twist. He had no chin to speak of, and his bright eyes protruded like those of a beetle. His voice, however, was surprisingly fine and resonant.

"You'd better sit behind, Doctor," said Redfield. "I shall be very busy on this trip."

"Very well," replied the other, "if Miss Wetherford remains beside me; otherwise I shall rebel." He was of those small, plain men whose absurd gallantry is never taken seriously by women, and yet is something more than pretence.

He began by asking a few questions about her mother's way of life, but as Lee was not very explicit, he became impersonal, and talked of whatsoever came into his mind—motor-cars, irrigation, hunting, flowers—anything at all; and the girl had nothing to do but to utter an occasional phrase to show that she was listening. It was all rather depressing to her, for she could not understand

how a man so garrulous could be a good physician. She was quite sure her mother would not treat him with the slightest respect.

After all, he talked well. His stream of conversation shortened the way for her, and she was surprised when they topped the last ridge and the Fork could be seen lying before them in the valley. Soon they were rolling quietly up the street to the door of the Wetherford House.

Springing out unaided, Lee hurried in, hoping to prepare her mother for the shock of the little physician's unimposing appearance, while Redfield remained behind to arm the physician for his encounter. "Now, Doctor, Mrs. Wetherford is a very singular and plain-spoken person. She's quite likely to swear like a man, but she will perform like a woman. Don't mind what she says; go ahead in your own way. Will you wait till after dinner, or shall I—"

"No, I shall make the examination first—while I'm hungry. My mind works quicker. I can't diagnose properly on a full stomach."

"Very well; line up with me, and together we'll beard the old grizzly in her den."

They found Lize on duty behind the counter as usual. Her face was dejected, her eyes dull, but as she caught sight of the strange little man, she cried out: "Lord God, Reddy, why didn't you bring me a *man?*"

"Hush, mother," cautioned Lee, "this is the famous Eastern physician."

"You can't be famous for your beauty—you must be brainy," she remarked to herself in the stranger's hearing.

Redfield presented "Doctor Fessenden, of Omaha."

She started again on contemptuous ways, but was stopped by the little man. "Get down out o' that chair!" he commanded. "My time is money!"

Lize flushed with surprise and anger, but obeyed, and Lee Virginia, secretly delighted with the physician's imperative manner, led the way into the lodging-house. "I'll look after the cash, mother," she said. "Don't worry."

"I'm not worryin'," she replied; "but what does that little whelp mean by talking to me like that? I'll swat him one if he isn't careful!"

"It's his way. Please don't anger him. You need his help."

The doctor interfered. "Now, madam, strip, and let's see what's the matter with you," whereupon he laid off his coat, and opened his box of instruments.

Lee fled, and Redfield, who had remained standing beside the counter, could not repress a smile. "She's caught a tartar this time. He's a little tiger, isn't he? I had prepared him for war, but I didn't expect him to fly at her that way."

"Poor mother! how dreadfully ill she looks to-day. I hope the doctor will order her to rest."

"But will she obey? I've argued that with her. She keeps saying she will, but she won't."

It was nearly one, but the customers were coming in, and the girl, laying aside her hat and veil, took her seat at the cash-register, while Redfield went out to put his machine in order for the return trip. She realized

that she was now at close-hand grapple with life. For the most part she had been able, up to this time, to keep in the background, and to avoid the eyes of the rough men who came and went before her mother's seat. But now she was not merely exposed to their bold glances; she was in a position where each man could make excuse to stop and demand a word what time his change was being counted.

Her glowing cheeks, her pretty dress, made her a shining mark, and the men began at once to improve their opportunity by asking, "Where's Lize?" And this embarrassed her, for the reason that she did not care to go into the cause of her mother's temporary absence, and, perceiving her confusion, one of them passed to coarse compliment. "There's nothing the matter with you," he said, with a leer. Others, though coarse, were kindly in their familiarity, and Sifton, with gentle face, remained to help her bear the jests of the more uncouth and indelicate of her admirers.

Perceiving her nervousness, Neill Ballard raised loud outcry over a mistake she made in returning change, and this so confused and angered her that her eyes misted with tears, and she blundered sadly with the next customer. His delight in her discomfiture, his words, his grin became unendurable, and in a flush of rage and despair she sprang to her feet and left them to make triumphant exit. "I got her rattled!" he roared, as he went out. "She'll remember me."

The diners were all smiling, and Gregg took a malicious satisfaction in her defeat. She had held herself

haughtily apart from him, and he was glad to see her humbled.

Leaving her place behind the counter, she walked through the room with uplifted head and burning eyes, her heart filled with bitterness and fire. She hated the whole town, the whole State, at the moment. Were these "the chivalrous short-grass knights" she had heard so much about? These the large-souled "Western founders of empire"? At the moment she was in the belief that all the heroes of her childhood had been of the stamp of Neill Ballard — selfish, lustful, and cruel.

In the hall her pride, her sense of duty, came back to her, and she halted her fleeing feet. "I will not be beaten!" she declared, and her lips straightened. "I will not let these dreadful creatures make a fool of me in that way!"

Thereupon she turned and went back, pale now, but resolved to prove herself the mistress of the situation. Fortunately Redfield had returned, and his serene presence helped her to recover complete control of herself. She remained coldly blank to every compliment, and by this means she subdued them. "Why doesn't the doctor return for his dinner?" she asked, after the room had cleared. The desire to know her mother's real condition at last quite subordinated her own besetments. To some of the older men whom she knew to be neighbors and friends she gladly explained the situation, and their sympathy did something to restore her faith in humankind. Nevertheless, this hour of unprotected

intercourse with the citizens of the town was disturbing, humiliating, and embittering.

The doctor appearing suddenly in the door beckoned to her, and, leaving her place, she crossed to where he stood. "Your mother needs you," he said, curtly. "Go to her, and keep her quiet for an hour or two if you can."

"What is the matter, doctor?"

"I can't tell you precisely, but you must get her on a diet and keep her there. I will write out some lists for you after my luncheon."

Lee found her mother sitting in such dejection as she had never known her to display, though she fired up sufficiently to say: "That cussed little thimble-rigger has been throwing a great big scare into me. He says I've got to get out-doors, live on raw meat and weak tea, and walk five miles a day. That's what he says!" she added, in renewed astonishment at the man's audacity. "Who's at the cash?"

"Mr. Redfield," replied Lee. "I'll go right back."

"No you won't, I'm no dead horse yet." She struggled to her feet and started for the cash-register. "I won't let no little Omaha doughie like that put me out o' business."

Despite all warnings, she walked out into the dining-room and took her accustomed seat with set and stern face, while her daughter went to the table where the doctor sat, and explained her inability to manage her mother.

"That's *your* problem," he replied, coolly. Then

rapidly, succinctly, and clearly he went over the case, and laid out a course of treatment. Out of it all Lee deduced that her mother was very ill indeed, though not in danger of sudden death.

"She's on the chute," said Fessenden, "and everything depends upon her own action whether she takes the plunge this winter or twenty years from now. She's a strong woman—or has been—but she has presumed upon her strength. She used to live out-of-doors, she tells me, during all her early life, and now, shut in by these walls, working sixteen hours a day, she is killing herself. Get her out if you can, and cut out stimulants."

As he rose and approached the counter, Lize shoved a couple of gold pieces across the board. "That wipes you off my map," she grimly declared. "I hope you enjoyed your ride."

"It's up to you, madam," he replied, pocketing the gold. "Good-day!"

Lee followed him out to the car, eager to secure all she could of his wisdom. He repeated his instructions. "Medicine can't help her much," he said, "but diet can do a great deal. Get her out of that rut she's in. Good-bye."

"I'll be down again in a day or two!" called Redfield.

The machine began to purr and spit and the wheels to spin, and Lee Virginia was left to face her mother's obstinate resistance alone. She felt suddenly very desolate, very weak, and very poor. "What if mother should die?" she asked herself.

Gregg was standing before the counter talking with

Lize as Lee returned, and he said, with a broad smile: "I've just been saying I'd take this hotel off your mother's hands provided you went with it."

In the mouths of some men these words would have been harmless enough, but coming from the tongue of one whose life could only be obscurely hinted at the jest was an insult. The girl shuddered with repulsion, and Lize spoke out:

"Now see here, Bullfrog, I'm dead on the hoof and all that, but neither you nor any other citizen like you can be funny with my girl. She's not for you. Now that's final! She ain't your kind."

Gregg's smile died into a gray, set smirk, and his eyes took on a steely glint. He knew when the naked, unadorned truth was spoken to him. Words came slowly to his lips, but he said: "You'll be glad to come to me for help some day—both of you."

"Oh, get along! You don't hold no mortgage on me," retorted Lize, contemptuously, and turned to Lee. "I'm hungry. Where's that grub chart o' mine?"

Lee brought the doctor's page of notes and read it through, while her mother snorted at intervals: "Hah! dry toast, weak tea, no coffee, no alcohol. Huh! I might as well starve! Eggs—fish—milk! Why didn't he say boiled live lobsters and champagne? I tell you right now, I'm not going to go into that kind of a game. If I die I'm going to die eating what I blame please."

The struggle had begun. With desperate courage Lee fought, standing squarely in the rut of her mother's daily habit. "You must not hive up here any longer,"

she insisted; "you must get out and walk and ride. I can take care of the house—at least, till we can sell it."

It was like breaking the pride of an athlete, but little by little she forced upon her mother a realization of her true condition, and at last Lize consented to offer the business for sale. Then she wept (for the first time in years), and the sight moved her daughter much as the sobs of a strong man would have done.

She longed for the presence of Ross Cavanagh at this moment, when all her little world seemed tumbling into ruin; and almost in answer to her wordless prayer came a messenger from the little telephone office: "Some one wants to talk to you."

She answered this call hurriedly, thinking at first that it must be Mrs. Redfield. The booth was in the little sitting-room of a private cottage, and the mistress of the place, a shrewd little woman with inquisitive eyes, said: "Sounds to me like Ross Cavanagh's voice."

Lee was thankful for the booth's privacy, for her cheeks flamed up at this remark; and when she took up the receiver her heart was beating so loud it seemed as if the person at the other end of the wire must hear it. "Who is it, please?" she asked, with breathless intensity.

A man's voice came back over the wire so clear, so distinct, so intimate, it seemed as if he were speaking into her ear. "It is I, Ross Cavanagh. I want to ask how your mother is?"

"She is terribly disheartened by what the doctor has said, but she is in no immediate danger."

He perceived her agitation, and was instantly sympathetic. "Can I be of use—do you need me? If you do, I'll come down."

"Where are you?"

"I am at the sawmill—the nearest telephone station."

"How far away are you?"

"About thirty miles."

"Oh!" She expressed in this little sound her disappointment, and as it trembled over the wire he spoke quickly: "Please tell me! Do you want me to come down? Never mind the distance—I can ride it in a few hours."

She was tempted, but bravely said: "No; I'd like to see you, of course, but the doctor said mother was in no danger. You must not come on our account."

He felt the wonder of the moment's intercourse over the wilderness steeps, and said so. "You can't imagine how strangely sweet and civilized your voice sounds to me here in this savage place. It makes me hope that some day you and Mrs. Redfield will come up and visit me in person."

"I should like to come."

"Perhaps it would do your mother good to camp for a while. Can't you persuade her to do so?"

"I'm trying to do that—I mean, to stop work; but she says, 'What can we do to earn a living?'"

"If nothing happens I hope to spend an hour or two at the Forks next Sunday. I hope to find your mother better."

Their words were of this unemotional sort, but in

their voices something subtler than the electrical current vibrated. He called to her in wordless fashion and she answered in the same mysterious code, and when she said "Good-bye" and hung up the receiver her world went suddenly gray and commonplace, as if a ray of special sunlight had been withdrawn.

The attendant asked, with village bluntness: "It *was* Ross, wasn't it?"

Lee Virginia resented this almost as much as if it were the question of an eavesdropper; but she answered: "Yes; he wanted to know how my mother was."

She turned as she reached the street and looked up toward the glorious purpling deeps from which the ranger's voice had come, and the thought that he was the sole guardian of those dark forests and shining streams—that his way led among those towering peaks and lone canons—made of him something altogether admirable.

That night her loneliness, her sense of weakness, carried her to bed with tears of despair in her eyes. Lize had insisted on going back to her work looking like one stricken with death, yet so rebellious that her daughter could do nothing with her; and in the nature of fate the day's business had been greater than ever, so that they had all been forced to work like slaves to feed the flood of custom. And Lize herself still kept her vigil in her chair above her gold.

Closing her mind to the town and all it meant to her, the girl tried to follow, in imagination, the ranger treading his far, high trails. She recalled his voice, so culti-

vated, so rich of inflection, with dangerous tenderness. It had come down to her from those lofty parapets like that of a friend, laden with something sweeter than sympathy, more alluring than song.

The thought of some time going up to the high country where he dwelt came to her most insistently, and she permitted herself to dream of long days of companionship with him, of riding through sunlit aisles of forest with him, of cooking for him at the cabin—what time her mother grew strong once more—and these dreams bred in her heart a wistful ache, a hungry need which made her pillow a place of mingled ecstasy and pain.

VII

THE POACHERS

One morning, as he topped the rise between the saw-mill and his own station, Cavanagh heard two rifle-shots in quick succession snapping across the high peak on his left. Bringing his horse to a stand, he unslung his field-glasses, and slowly and minutely swept the tawny slopes of Sheep Mountain from which the forbidden sounds seemed to come.

"A herder shooting coyotes," was his first thought; then remembering that there were no camps in that direction, and that a flock of mountain-sheep (which he had been guarding carefully) habitually fed round that grassy peak, his mind changed. "I wonder if those fellows are after those sheep?" he mused, as he angled down the slope. "I reckon it's up to me to see."

He was tired and hungry, a huge moraine lay between, and the trail was long and rough. "To catch them in the act is impossible. However," he reflected, "they have but two trails along which to descend. One of these passes my door, and the other, a very difficult trail, leads down the South Fork. I'll have time to get breakfast and change horses. They'll probably wait till night before attempting to go out, anyway."

In less than three hours he was over on the trail in the canon, quite certain that the hunters were still above him. He rode quietly up the valley, pausing often to listen and to scrutinize the landscape; but no sign of campfire and no further rifle-shots came, and at last he went into camp upon the trail, resolved to wait till the poachers appeared, a ward which his experience as a soldier helped him to maintain without nodding.

In these long hours his thought played about the remembrance of his last visit to the Fork and his hour with Lee. He wondered what she was doing at the moment. How charming she had looked there at Redfields'—so girlish in form, so serious and womanly of face!

He felt as never before the ineludible loneliness of the ranger's life. Here he sat in the midst of a mighty forest with many hostile minds all about him, and it must be confessed he began to wonder whether his services to the nation were worth so much hardship, such complete isolation. The stream sang of the eternities, and his own short span of life (half gone already without any permanent accomplishment) seemed pitifully ephemeral. The guardians of these high places must forever be solitary. No ranger could rightfully be husband and father, for to bring women and children into these solitudes would be cruel.

He put all this aside—for the time—by remembering that he was a soldier under orders, and that marriage was a long way off, and so smoked his pipe and waited for the dawn, persistent as a Sioux, and as silent as a fox.

At daylight, there being still no sign of his quarry, he

saddled his horse, and was about to ride up the trail when he caught the sound of voices and the sharp click of iron hoofs on the rocks above him. With his horse's bridle on his arm he awaited the approaching horseman, resolute and ready to act.

As the marauders rounded the elbow in the trail, he was surprised to recognize in the leader young Gregg. The other man was a stranger, an older man, with a grizzled beard, and tall and stooping figure.

"Hello Joe," called the ranger, "you're astir early!"

The youth's fat face remained imperturbable, but his eyes betrayed uneasiness. "Yes, it's a long pull into town."

"Been hunting?" queried the ranger, still with cheery, polite interest.

"Oh no; just visiting one of my sheep-camps."

Cavanagh's voice was a little less suave. "Not on this creek," he declared. "I moved your herder last week." He walked forward. "That's a heavy load for a short trip to a sheep-camp." He put his hand on the pack. "I guess you'll have to open this, for I heard two shots yesterday morning up where that flock of mountain-sheep is running, and, furthermore, I can see blood-stains on this saddle-blanket."

Neither of the men made answer, but the old man turned an inquiring look at his young leader.

The ranger flung his next sentence out like the lash of a whip. "*Open this sack or I cut the ropes!*"

Gregg threw out a hand in command. "Open it up, Edwards!" he said, sullenly.

With mechanical readiness the guide alighted from his horse, loosened the cinch on the pack-horse, and disclosed the usual camp-bed.

"Put off that bedding!" insisted the ranger.

Off came the outfit, and under the tent lay the noble head of a wild ram—a look of reproach still in his splendid yellow eyes.

Cavanagh's face hardened. "I thought so. Now heave it back and cinch up. It's you to the nearest magistrate, which happens to be Higley, of Roaring Fork. I'll make an example of you fellows."

There was nothing for Gregg to say and nothing for Edwards to do but obey, for a resolute ranger with an excellent weapon of the latest and most approved angular pattern stood ready to enforce his command; and when the pack was recinched, Cavanagh waved an imperative hand. "I guess I'll have to take charge of your guns," he said, and they yielded without a word of protest. "Now march! Take the left-hand trail. I'll be close behind."

A couple of hours of silent travel brought them to the ranger's cabin, and there he ordered a dismount.

As the coffee was boiling he lectured them briefly. "You fellows are not entirely to blame," he remarked, philosophically. "You've been educated to think a game warden a joke and Uncle Sam a long way off. But things have changed a bit. The law of the State has made me game warden, and I'm going to show you how it works. It's my duty to see that you go down the road—and down you go!"

Edwards, the guide, was plainly very uneasy, and made several attempts to reach Cavanagh's private ear, and at last succeeded. "I've been fooled into this," he urged. "I was hard up and a stranger in the country, and this young fellow hired me to guide him across the range. I didn't shoot a thing. I swear I didn't. If you'll let me off, I'll hit the trail to the West and never look back. For God's sake, don't take me down the road! Let me off."

"I can't do that," replied Cavanagh; but his tone was kindlier, for he perceived that the old fellow was thin, hollow-chested, and poorly clad. "You knew you were breaking the laws, didn't you?"

This the culprit admitted. "But I was working for Sam Gregg, and when Joe asked me to go show him the trail, I didn't expect to get cinched for killing game. I didn't fire a shot—now that's the God's truth."

"Nevertheless," retorted Ross, "you were packing the head, and I must count you in the game."

Edwards fell silent then, but something in his look deepened the ranger's pity. His eyes were large and dark, and his face so emaciated that he seemed fit only for a sanitarium.

The trip to the Fork (timed to the gait of a lazy pack-horse) was a tedious eight hours' march, and it was nearly seven o'clock when they arrived at the outskirts of the village. There had been very few words spoken by Cavanagh, and those which the prisoners uttered were not calculated to cheer the way. Joe blamed his

guide for their mishap. "You should have known how far the sound of our guns would carry," he said.

As they were nearing the village he called out: "See here, Cavanagh, there's no use taking me through town under arrest. I'll cough up all we got right now. How much is the damage?"

"I can't receive your fine," replied Ross, "and, besides, you took your chances when you shot that sheep. You lost out, and I'm not going to let you off. This poaching must stop. You go right along with your guide."

Again Edwards drew near, and pled in a low voice: "See here, Mr. Ranger, I have special reasons why I don't want to go into this town under arrest. I wish you'd let me explain."

There was deep emotion in his voice, but Ross was firm. "I'm sorry for you," he said, "but my duty requires me to take you before a magistrate—"

"But you don t know my case," he replied, with bitter intensity. "I'm out 'on parole.' I can't afford to be arrested in this way. Don't you see?"

Ross looked at him closely. "*Are* you telling me the truth?"

"Would you have mercy on me if I were?"

"I should be sorry for you, but I couldn't let you go."

"You won't believe me, but it's the God Almighty's truth: I didn't know Joe intended to kill that sheep. He asked me to show him over the pass. I had no intention of killing anything. I wish to God you would let me go!" His voice was tense with pleading.

"How about this, Gregg?" called Ross. "Your guide insists he had no hand in killing the ram?"

"He fired first, and I fired and finished him," retorted Gregg.

"'Twas the other way," declared Edwards. "The beast was crippled and escaping—I killed him with my revolver. I didn't want to see him go off and die—"

"I guess that settles it," said Cavanagh, decisively. "You take your medicine with Joe. If the justice wants to let you off easy, I can't help it, but to turn you loose now would mean disloyalty to the service. Climb back into your saddle."

Edwards turned away with shaking hands and unsteady step. "All right," he said, "I'll meet it." He came back to say: "There's no need of your saying anything about what I've told you."

"No, you are a stranger to me. I know nothing of your life except that I found you with Joe, with this pack on your horse."

"Much obliged," said he, with a touch of bitter humor.

To the casual observer in a town of this character there was nothing specially noticeable in three horsemen driving a pack-horse, but to those whose eyes were keen the true relationship of the ranger to his captives was instantly apparent, and when they alighted at Judge Higley's office a bunch of eager observers quickly collected.

"Hello Joe, what luck?" called Ballard.

"Our luck was a little too good—we caught a game warden," replied the young scapegrace.

The ranger was chagrined to find the office of the justice closed for the day, and, turning to his captives, said: "I'm hungry, and I've no doubt you are. I'm going to take you into Mike Halsey's saloon for supper, but remember you are my prisoners." And to the little old remittance man, Sifton, who caught his eye, he explained his need of a justice and the town marshal.

"I'll try to find the judge," replied Sifton, with ready good-will, and at a sign from the ranger, Gregg and his herder entered the saloon.

In fifteen minutes the town was rumbling with the news. Under Ballard's devilry, all the latent hatred of the ranger and all the concealed opposition to the Forest Service came to the surface like the scum on a pot of broth. The saloons and eating-houses boiled with indignant protest. "What business is it of Ross Cavanagh's?" they demanded. "What call has he to interfere? He's not a game warden."

"Yes he is. All these rangers are game wardens," corrected another.

"No, they're not. They have to be commissioned by the Governor."

"Well, he's been commissioned; he's warden all right."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, he's too fresh. He needs to have a halt. Let's do him. Let's bluff him out."

Lee Virginia was in the kitchen superintending the service when one of the waiters came in, breathless with excitement. "Ross Cavanagh has shot Joe Gregg for killing sheep!"

Lee faced her with blanched face. "Who told you so?"

"They're all talking about it out there. Gee! but they're hot. Some of 'em want to lynch him."

Lee hurried out into the dining-room, which was crowded with men and voicing deep excitement. Anger was in the air—a stormy rage, perceptible as a hot blast; and as she passed one table after another she heard ugly phrases applied to Cavanagh.

A half-dozen men were standing before the counter talking with Lize, but Lee pushed in to inquire with white, inquiring face: "What is it all about? What has happened?"

"Nothing much," Lize replied, contemptuously, "but you'd think a horse had been stole. Ross has nipped Joe Gregg and one of his herders for killing mountain-sheep."

"Do you mean he shot them?"

"Yes; he took their heads."

Lee stood aghast. "What do you mean? Whose heads?"

Lize laughed. "The sheeps' heads. Oh, don't be scared, no one is hurt yet!"

The girl flushed with confusion as the men roared over her blunder. "One of the girls told me Mr. Cavanagh had killed a man," she explained. "Where is he?"

Lize betrayed annoyance. "They say he's taking supper at Mike Halsey's, though why he didn't come here I don't see. What's he going to do?" she asked. "Won't the marshal take the men off his hands?"

"Not without warrant from Higley, and Higley is out of town. Ross 'll have to hold 'em till Higley gets back, or else take 'em over to Chauvenet," Lize snorted. "Old Higley! Yes, he's been known to disappear before when there was some real work to be done."

The girl looked about her with a sharpening realization of the fact that all these men were squarely opposed to the ranger, and rather glad to know that his guardianship of the poachers was to be rendered troublesome. She could hear on all sides bitter curses openly directed against him. How little of real manliness could be detected in these grinning or malignant faces! Ill-formed, half-developed, bestial most of them, while others, though weakly good-humored, were ready to go with whatever current of strong passion blew upon them. Over against such creatures Ross Cavanagh stood off in heroic contrast—a man with work to do, and doing it like a patriot.

She went back to her own task with a vague sense of alarm. "Certainly they will not dare to interfere with an officer in the discharge of his duties," she thought. She was eager to see him, and the thought that he might be obliged to ride away to Chauvenet without a word to her gave her a deeper feeling of annoyance and unrest. That he was in any real danger she could not believe.

It was disheartening to Cavanagh to see how some of the most influential citizens contrived to give encouragement to the riotous element of the town. A wink, a gesture, a careless word to the proper messenger, conveyed to the saloon rounders an assurance of sympathy which inflamed their resentment to the murderous point.

The truth is, this little village, sixty miles from the railway, still retained in its dives and shanties the lingering miasma of the old-time free-range barbarism. It trailed a dark history on its legal side as well as on its openly violent side, for it had been one of the centres of the Rustler's War, and one of the chief points of attack on the part of the cattle-barons. It was still a rendezvous for desperate and shameless characters—a place of derelicts, survivals of the days of deep drinking, furious riding, and ready gun-play.

True, its famous desperadoes were now either dead or distantly occupied; but the mantle of violence, the tradition of lawlessness, had fallen to the seedy old cowpunchers and to the raw and vulgar youths from the ill-conditioned homes of the middle West. The air of the reckless old-time range still clung rancidly in the low groggeries, as a deadly gas hangs about the lower levels of a mine. It was confessedly one of the worst communities in the State.

"Let's run the sonovagun!" was the suggestion of several of Gregg's friends.

The fact that the ranger was a commissioned officer of the law, and that the ram's head had been found on the poacher's pack, made very little difference to these irresponsible instigators to assault. It was wonderful how highly that loafing young rascal, Joe Gregg, was prized at the moment. "It's an outrage that the son of a leading citizen should be held up in this way by one of the forestry Cossacks," declared one of the merchants.

The discussion which took place over the bars of the

town was at the riot-heat by nine o'clock, and soon after ten a crowd of howling, whooping bad boys, and disreputable ranch-hands was parading the walks, breathing out vile threats against the ranger.

Accustomed to men of this type, Cavanagh watched them come and go at Halsey's bar with calculating eyes. "There will be no trouble for an hour or two, but meanwhile what is to be done? Higley is not to be found, and the town marshal is also 'out of town.'" To Halsey he said: "I am acting, as you know, under both Federal and State authority, and I call upon you as a law-abiding citizen to aid me in holding these men prisoners. I shall camp right here till morning, or until the magistrate or the marshal relieves me of my culprits."

Halsey was himself a sportsman—a genuine lover of hunting and a fairly consistent upholder of the game laws; but perceiving that the whole town had apparently lined up in opposition to the ranger, he lost courage. His consent was half-hearted, and he edged away toward the front window of his bar-room, nervously seeking to be neutral—"to carry water on both shoulders," as the phrase goes.

The talk grew less jocular as the drinks took effect, and Neill Ballard, separating himself from the crowd, came forward, calling loudly: "Come out o' there, Joe! Youse a hell of a sport! Come out and have a drink!"

His words conveyed less of battle than his tone. He was, in fact, urging a revolt, and Cavanagh knew it.

Gregg rose as if to comply. The ranger stopped him. "Keep your seat," said he. And to Ballard he warn-

ingly remarked: "And you keep away from my prisoners."

"Do you own this saloon?" retorted the fellow, truculently. "I reckon Halsey's customers have some rights. What are you doing here, anyway? This is no jail."

"Halsey has given me the privilege of holding my prisoners here till the justice is found. It isn't my fault that the town is without judge or jail." He was weakened by the knowledge that Halsey had only half-consented to aid justice; but his pride was roused, and he was determined upon carrying his arrest to its legitimate end. "I'm going to see that these men are punished if I have to carry them to Sulphur City," he added.

"Smash the lights!" shouted some one at the back.

Here was the first real note of war, and Ross cried out sharply: "If a man lifts a hand toward the light I'll cut it off!"

There was a stealthy movement in the crowd, and leaping upon the counter a reckless cub reached for the lamp.

Cavanagh's revolver shattered the globe in the fellow's very palm. "Get down from there!" he commanded.

The crowd surged back against the front door, several drawn weapons shining in their hands. Some of the faces were a-grin, others were thrust forward like the heads of snakes, their eyes glittering with hate.

It is an appalling moment to a man of discernment when he looks into the faces of his fellows and hears only the laugh of the wolf, the hiss of the snake, the snarl of the tiger. At the moment Cavanagh despised with a

measureless contempt the entire commonwealth and its long-established school of violence; but fixing his thought on his far-away chief, he lost all fear. His voice was perfectly calm as he said: "I am wearing the uniform of the Federal service, and the man that interferes with me will feel the vengeance of the Federal arm. You can get me, but I'll get some of you at the same time, and the department will get the rest."

The mob had not found its leader. It hesitated and blustered but did not strike, and eventually edged out of the door and disappeared; but the silence which followed its retreat was more alarming to the ranger than its presence. Some slyer mischief was in these minds. He feared that they were about to cut the electric-light wires, and so plunge him into darkness, and to prepare for that emergency he called upon the bartender (Halsey having vanished) for a lamp or a lantern.

The fellow sullenly set about this task, and Ross, turning to Gregg, said: "If you've any influence with this mob, you'd better use it to keep them out of mischief, for I'm on this job to the bitter end, and somebody's going to be hurt."

Gregg, who seemed quite detached from the action and rather delighted with it, replied: "I have no influence. They don't care a hang about me; they have it in for you, that's all."

Edwards remained silent, with his hat drawn low over his eyes. It was evident that he was anxious to avoid being seen and quite willing to keep out of the conflict; but with no handcuffs and the back door of the saloon

unguarded, Ross was aware that his guard must be incessant and alertly vigilant. "Where are the law-abiding citizens of the town?" he asked of Sifton, who remained in the saloon.

The dry little whisp of manhood had some spark of life in him, for he said: "In their beds, the cowardly hounds!"

"They must know that this gang of hobos is threatening me."

"Certainly they do; but they don't intend to endanger their precious hides. They would be well pleased to have you disabled."

It was incredible! Low as his estimate of the Fork had been, Cavanagh could not believe that it would sit quietly by and see an officer of the State defeated in his duty. "Such a thing could not happen under the English flag," he said, and at the moment his adopted country seemed a miserable makeshift. Only the thought of Redfield and the chief nerved him for the long vigil. "The chief will understand if it comes up to him," he said.

Lize Wetherford came hurrying in, looking as though she had just risen from her bed. She was clothed in a long red robe, her grizzled hair was loose, her feet were bare, and she carried a huge old-fashioned revolver in her hand. Her mouth was stern.

Stopping abruptly as she caught sight of Ross standing in the middle of the floor unhurt, she exclaimed: "There you are! Are you all right?"

"As a trivet," he replied.

She let her gun-hand relax. "What was the shooting?"

"A little bluff on my part."

"Anybody hurt?"

"No."

She was much relieved. "I was afraid they'd got you. I came as quick as I could. I was abed. That fool doctor threw a chill into me, and I've been going to roost early according to orders. I didn't hear your gun, but Lee did, and she came to tell me. They're hell-roaring down the street yet. Don't let 'em get behind you. If I was any good I'd stay and help. Where's Mike?" She addressed the tender at the bar.

"I don't know. Gone home, I guess."

"Sneaked, has he?"

"So far as I know the only law-upholding citizen in the place, barring yourself, is Sifton," said Ross, indicating the Englishman, who stood as if cold, pressing his hands together to hide their trembling.

Lize perceived the irony of this. "Two Britishers and two women! Well, by God, this is a fine old town! What you going to do—hold your men here all night?"

"I don't see any other way. Halsey turned the place over to me—but—" He looked about him suspiciously.

"Bring 'em into my place. Lee has had new locks put on our doors; they'll help some."

"I don't like to do that, Mrs. Wetherford," he replied, with greater respect than he had ever shown her before. "They may attack me there."

"All the better; I'll be on hand to help—but they're less likely to boil in on you through a locked door."

"But your daughter? It will alarm her."

"She'll be in the other house, and, besides, she'd feel easier if you are in my place. She's all wrought up by the attack on you."

Ross turned to his prisoners. "Follow Mrs. Wetherford and—eyes front!"

"You needn't worry about me," said Joe, "I won't run."

"I don't intend to give you a chance," replied Ross.

Edwards seemed to have lost in both courage and physical stature; he slouched along with shuffling step, his head bent and his face pale. Ross was now profoundly sorry for him, so utterly craven and broken was his look.

VIII

THE SECOND ATTACK

LEE was waiting on the porch of the hotel, tense with excitement, straining her ears and eyes to see what was taking place.

The night had started with a small sickle of moon, but this had dropped below the range, leaving the street dark, save where the lights from the windows of the all-night eating-houses and saloons lay out upon the walk, and, while she stood peering out, the sound of rancorous howling and shrill whooping came to her ears with such suggestion of ferocity that she shivered.

Every good and honorable trait seemed lost out of her neighbors. She saw the whole country but as a refuge for criminals, ungovernable youths, and unsexed women —a wilderness of those who had no regard for any code of morals which interfered with their own desires. Her memories of the past freshened as she listened. In such wise she had shuddered, as a child, while troops of celebrating cowboys rode up and down the streets. In such wise, too, the better (and more timid) element of the town had put out their lights and retired, leaving their drunken helots and the marshal to fight it out in vague tumult.

A few of the hotel guests had gone to bed, but the women were up, excited and nervous, starting at every fresh outburst of whooping, knowing that their sons or husbands were out in the street "to see the fun," and that they might meet trouble.

At last Lee discerned her mother returning from Halsey's, followed by three men. Withdrawing from the little porch whereon she had been standing, she re-entered the house to meet her mother in the hall. "Where is Mr. Cavanagh?" she asked.

"Out in the dining-room. You see, Mike Halsey is no kind o' use. He vamoosed and left Ross down there alone, with his two prisoners and the lights likely to be turned out on him. So I offered the caffy as a calaboose. They are sure in for a long and tedious night."

Lee was alarmed at her mother's appearance. "You must go to bed. You look ghastly."

"I reckon I'd better lie down for a little while, but I can't sleep. Ross may need me. There isn't a man to help him but me, and that loafer Ballard is full of gall. He's got it in for Ross, and will make trouble if he can."

"What can we do?"

"Shoot!" replied Lize, with dry brevity. "I wouldn't mind a chance to plug some of the sweet citizens of this town. I owe them one or two."

With this sentence in her ears, Lee Virginia went to her bed, but not to slumber. Her utter inability either to control her mother's action or to influence that of the mob added to her uneasiness.

The singing, shouting, trampling of the crowd went on, and once a group of men halted just outside her window, and she heard Neill Ballard noisily, drunkenly arguing as to the most effective method of taking the prisoners. His utterances, so profane and foul, came to her like echoes from out an inferno. The voices were all at the moment like the hissing of serpents, the snarling of tigers. How dared creatures of this vile type use words of contempt against Ross Cavanagh?

"Come on, boys!" urged Ballard, his voice filled with reckless determination. "Let's run him."

As they passed, the girl sprang up and went to her mother's room to warn her of the threatened attack.

Lize was already awake and calmly loading a second revolver by the light of the electric bulb.

"What are you doing?" the girl asked, her blood chilling at sight of the weapon.

"Hell's to pay out there, and I'm going to help pay it." A jarring blow was heard. "Hear that! They're breaking in—" She started to leave the room.

Lee stopped her. "Where are you going?"

"To help Ross. Here!" She thrust the handle of a smaller weapon into Lee's hand. "Ed Wetherford's girl ought to be able to take care of herself. Come on!"

With a most unheroic horror benumbing her limbs, Lee followed her mother through the hall. The sound of shouts and the trampling of feet could be heard, and she came out into the restaurant just in time to photograph upon her brain a scene whose significance was at once apparent. On a chair between his two prisoners,

and confronting Ballard at the head of a crowd of frenzied villains, stood the ranger, a gleaming weapon in his hand, a look of resolution on his face.

What he had said, or what he intended to do, she did not learn, for her mother rushed at the invaders with the mad bravery of a she-bear. "Get out of here!" she snarled, thrusting her revolver into the very mouth of the leader.

They all fell back in astonishment and fear.

Ross leaped to her side. "Leave them to me!" he said. "I'll clear the room."

"Not on your life! This is my house. I have the right to smash the fools." And she beat them over the heads with her pistol-barrel.

Recognizing that she was minded to kill, they retreated over the threshold, and Ross, drawing the door close behind them, turned to find Lee Virginia confronting Edwards, who had attempted to escape into the kitchen. The girl's face was white, but the eye of her revolver stared straight and true into her prisoner's face.

With a bound Ross seized him and flung him against the wall. "Get back there!" he shouted. "You must take your medicine with your boss."

The old fellow hurriedly replaced his ragged hat, and, folding his arms, sank back into his chair with bowed head, while Lize turned upon Joe Gregg. "What the devil did you go into this kind of deal for? You knew what the game laws was, didn't you? Your old dad is all for State regulation, and here you are breaking a State law. Why don't you stand up for the code like a sport?"

Joe, who had been boasting of the smiles he had drawn from Lee, did not relish this tongue-lashing from her mother, but, assuming a careless air, he said, "I'm all out of smokes; get me a box, that's a good old soul."

Lize regarded him with the expression of one nonplussed. "You impudent little cub!" she exclaimed. "What you need is a booting!"

The ranger addressed himself to Lee. "I want to thank you for a very opportune intervention. I didn't know you could handle a gun so neatly."

She flushed with pleasure. "Oh yes, I can shoot. My father taught me when I was only six years old."

As she spoke, Ross caught the man Edwards studying them with furtive glance, but, upon being observed, he resumed his crouching attitude, which concealed his face beneath the rim of his weather-worn hat. It was evident that he was afraid of being recognized. He had the slinking air of the convict, and his form, so despairing in its lax lines, appealed to Lee with even greater poignancy than his face. "I'm sorry," she said to him, "but it was my duty to help Mr. Cavanagh."

He glanced up with a quick sidewise slant. "That's all right, miss; I should have had sense enough to keep out of this business." He spoke with difficulty, and his voice was hoarse with emotion.

Lize turned to Lee. "The Doc said 'no liquor,' but I guess here's where I draw one—I feel faint."

Ross hurried to her side, while young Gregg tendered a handsome flask. "Here's something."

Lize put it away. "Not from you. Just reach under

my desk, Ross; you'll find some brandy there. That's it," she called, as he produced a bottle. Clutching it eagerly, she added: "They say it's poison, but it's my meat to-night."

She was, in truth, very pale, and her hands were trembling in a weakness that went to her daughter's heart. Lee admired her bravery, her manlike readiness of action, but her words, her manner (now that the stress of the battle was over), hurt and shamed her. Little remained of the woman in Lize, and the old sheep-herder eyed her with furtive curiosity.

"I was afraid you'd shoot," Lize explained to Ross, "and I didn't want you to muss up your hands on the dirty loafers. I had the right to kill; they were trespassers, and I'd 'a' done it, too."

"I don't think they intended to actually assault me," he said, "but it's a bit discouraging to find the town so indifferent over both the breaking of the laws and the doings of a drunken mob. I'm afraid the most of them are a long way from law-abiding people yet."

Joe, who did not like the position in which he stood as respecting Lee, here made an offer of aid. "I don't suppose my word is any good now, but if you'll let me do it I'll go out and round up Judge Higley. I think I know where he is."

To this Lize objected. "You can't do that, Ross; you better hold the fort right here till morning."

Lee was rather sorry, too, for young Gregg, who bore his buffeting with the imperturbable face of the heroes of his class. He had gone into this enterprise with much

the same spirit in which he had stolen gates and misplaced signs during his brief college career, and he was now disposed (in the presence of a pretty girl) to carry it out with undiminished impudence. "It only means a fine, anyway," he assured himself.

Cavanagh did not trust Gregg, either, and as this was the first time he had been called upon to arrest men for killing game out of season, he could not afford to fail of any precaution. Tired and sleepy as he was, he must remain on guard. "But you and your daughter must go to bed at once," he urged.

Lize, under the spur of her dram, talked on with bitter boldness. "I'm going to get out o' this town as soon as I can sell. I won't live in it a minute longer than I have to. It used to have men into it; now they're only hobos. It's neither the old time nor the new; it's just a betwixt and between, with a lot o' young cubs like Joe Gregg pretendin' to be tough. I never thought I'd be sighin' for horse-cars, but these rowdy chumps like Neill Ballard give me a pain. Not one of 'em has sand enough to pull a gun in the open, but they'd plug you from a dark alley or fire out of a crowd. It was different in the old days. I've seen men walk out into that street, face each other, and open fire quiet as molasses. But now it's all talk and blow. The *men* have all grown old or got out."

To this Gregg listened with expressionless visage, his eyes dreamily fixed on Lee's face; but his companion, the old herder, seemed to palpitate with shame and fear. And Ross had the feeling at the moment that in this ragged, unkempt old hobo was the skeleton of one of

the old-time heroes. He was wasted with drink and worn by wind and rain, but he was very far from being commonplace. "Here they come again!" called Lize, as the hurry of feet along the walk threatened another attack. Ross Cavanagh again drew his revolver and stood at guard, and Lize recovering her own weapon took a place by his side.

With the strength of a bear the new assailant shook the bolted door. "Let me in!" he roared.

"Go to hell!" replied Lize, calmly.

"It's dad!" called young Gregg. "Go away, you chump."

"Let me in or I'll smash this door!" retorted Gregg.

"You smash that door, old Bullfrog," announced Lize, "and I'll carry one of your lungs away. I know your howl—it don't scare me. I've stood off one whole mob to-night, and I reckon I'm good for you. If you want to get in here you hunt up the judge of this town and the constable."

After a pause Sam called, "Are you there, son?"

"You bet he is," responded Lize, "and here he'll stay."

Joe added: "And you'd better take the lady's advice, pop. She has the drop on you."

The old rancher muttered a fierce curse while Ross explained the situation. "I'm as eager to get rid of these culprits as any one can be, but they must be taken by proper authority. Bring a writ from the magistrate and you may have them and welcome."

Gregg went away without further word, and Lize said: "He'll find Higley if he's in town; and he *is* in

town, for I saw him this afternoon. He's hiding out to save himself trouble."

Lee Virginia, with an understanding of what the ranger had endured, asked: "Can't I get you something to eat? Would you like some coffee?"

"I would, indeed," he answered, and his tone pleased her.

She hurried away to get it while Cavanagh disposed his prisoners behind a couple of tables in the corner. "I guess you're in for a night of it," he remarked, grimly. "So make yourselves as comfortable as you can. Perhaps your experience may be a discouragement to others of your kind."

Lee returned soon with a pot of fresh coffee and some sandwiches, the sight of which roused young Gregg to impudent remark. "Well, notice that! And we're left out!" But Edwards shrank into the shadow, as if the light hurt him.

Ross thanked Lee formally, but there was more than gratitude in his glance, and she turned away to hide her face from other eyes. Strange place it was for the blooming of love's roses, but they were in her cheeks as she faced her mother; and Lize, with fresh acknowledgment of her beauty, broke out again: "Well, this settles it. I'm going to get out of this town, dearie. I'm done. This ends the cattle country for me. I don't know how I've put up with these yapps all these years. I've been robbed and insulted and spit upon just long enough. I won't have you dragged into this mess. I ought to have turned you back the day you landed here."

The old man in the corner was listening, straining his attention in order to catch every word she uttered, and Ross again caught a gleam in his eyes which puzzled him. Before he had time to turn his wonder over in his mind they all caught the sound of feet along the walk, but this time the sound was sedate and regular, like the movement of police.

Both prisoners rose to their feet as Cavanagh again stood alert. The feet halted; a sharp rap sounded on the door.

"Who's there?" demanded Lize.

"The law!" replied a wheezy voice. "Open in the name of the law!"

"It's old Higley," announced Lize. "Open the door, Ross."

"Come in, Law," she called, ironically, as the justice appeared. "You look kind of mice-eaten, but you're all the law this blame town can sport. Come in and do your duty."

Higley (a tall man, with a rusty brown beard, very much on his dignity) entered the room, followed by a short, bullet-headed citizen in a rumpled blue suit with a big star on his breast. Behind on the sidewalk Ballard and a dozen of his gang could be seen. Sam Gregg, the moving cause of this resurrection of law and order, followed the constable, bursting out big curses upon his son. "You fool," he began, "I warned you not to monkey with them sheep. You—"

Higley had the grace to stop that. "Let up on the cuss-words, Sam; there are ladies present," said he, nod-

ding toward Lee. Then he opened upon Cavanagh. "Well, sir, what's all this row? What's your charge against these men?"

"Killing mountain sheep. I caught them with the head of a big ram upon their pack."

"Make him show his commission," shouted Gregg. "He's never been commissioned. He's no game warden."

Higley hemmed. "I—ah—Oh, his authority is all right, Sam; I've seen it. If he can prove that these men killed the sheep, we'll have to act."

Cavanagh briefly related how he had captured the men on the trail. "The head of the ram is at the livery barn with my horse."

"How about that?" asked Higley, turning to Joe.

"I guess that's right," replied the insolent youth. "We killed the sheep all right."

Higley was in a corner. He didn't like to offend Gregg, and yet the case was plain. He met the issue blandly. "Marshal, take these men into custody!" Then to Ross: "We'll relieve you of their care, Mr. Cavanagh. You may appear to-morrow at nine."

It was a farcical ending to a very arduous thirty-six-hour campaign, and Ross, feeling like a man who, having rolled a huge stone to the top of a hill, has been ordered to drop it, said, "I insist on the maximum penalty of the law, Justice Higley, especially for this man!" He indicated Joe Gregg.

"No more sneaking, Higley," added Lize, uttering her distrust in blunt phrase. "You put these men through or I'll make you trouble."

Higley turned, and with unsteady solemnity saluted. "Fear not my government, madam," said he, and so made exit.

After the door had closed behind them, Cavanagh bitterly complained. "I've delivered my prisoners over into the hands of their friends. I feel like a fool. What assurance have I that they will ever be punished?"

"You have Higley's word," retorted Lize, with ironic inflection. He'll fine 'em as much as ten dollars apiece, and confiscate the head, which is worth fifty."

"No matter what happens now, you've done your duty," added Lee Virginia, with intent to comfort him.

Lize, now that the stress of the battle was over, fell a-tremble. "I reckon I'll have to go to bed," she admitted. "I'm all in. This night service is wearing."

Ross was alarmed at the sudden droop of her head. "Lean on me," he said, "it's my turn to be useful."

She apologized. "I can't stand what I could once," she confessed, as he aided her into the hotel part of the building. "It's my nerve—seems like it's all gone. I go to pieces like a sick girl."

She did, indeed, resemble the wreck of a woman as she lay out upon her bed, her hands twitching, her eyes closed, and Ross was profoundly alarmed. "You need the doctor," he urged. "Let me bring him."

"No," she said, huskily, but with decision, "I'm only tired—I'll be all right soon. Send the people away; tell 'em to go to bed."

For half an hour Cavanagh remained in the room waiting to see if the doctor's services would be required,

but at the end of that time, as she had apparently fallen asleep, he rose and tiptoed out into the hall.

Lee followed, and they faced each other in such intimacy as the shipwrecked feel after the rescue. The house was still astir with the feet of those to whom the noises of the night had been a terror or a lure, and their presence, so far from being a comfort, a protection, filled the girl's heart with fear and disgust. The ranger explained the outcome of the turmoil, and sent the excited folk to their beds with the assurance that all was quiet and that their landlady was asleep.

When they were quite alone Lee said: "You must not go out into the streets to-night."

"There's no danger. These hoodlums would not dare to attack me."

"Nevertheless, you shall not go!" she declared. "Wait a moment," she commanded, and re-entered her mother's room.

As he stood there at Lize Wetherford's door, and his mind went back over her brave deed, which had gone far to atone for her vulgarity, his respect for her deepened. Her resolute insistence upon law showed a complete change of front. "There is more good in her than I thought," he admitted, and it gave him pleasure, for it made Lee Virginia's character just that much more dependable. He thrilled with a new and wistful tenderness as the girl opened the door and stepped out, close beside him.

"Her breathing is quieter," she whispered. "I think she's going to sleep. It's been a terrible night! You

must be horribly tired. I will find you some place to sleep."

"It has been a strenuous campaign," he admitted. "I've been practically without sleep for three nights, but that's all in my job. I won't mind if Higley will 'soak' those fellows properly."

She looked troubled. "I don't know what to do about a bed for you; everything is taken—except the couch in the front room."

"Don't trouble, I beg of you. I can pitch down anywhere. I'm used to hard beds. I must be up early tomorrow, anyway."

"Please don't go till after breakfast," she smiled, wanly, "I may need you."

He understood. "What did the doctor say?"

"He said mother was in a very low state of vitality and that she must be very careful, which was easy enough to say. But how can I get her to rest and to diet? You have seen how little she cares for the doctor's orders. He told her not to touch alcohol."

"She is more like a man than a woman," he answered.

She led the way into the small sitting-room which lay at the front of the house, and directly opposite the door of her own room. It was filled with shabby parlor furniture, and in one corner stood a worn couch. "I'm sorry, but I can offer nothing better," she said. "Every bed is taken, but I have plenty of blankets."

There was something delightfully suggestive in being thus waited upon by a young and handsome woman, and the ranger submitted to it with the awkward grace of

one unaccustomed to feminine care. The knowledge that the girl was beneath him in birth, and that she was considered to be (in a sense) the lovely flower of a corrupt stock, made the manifest innocency of her voice and eyes the more appealing. He watched her moving about the room with eyes in which a furtive flame glowed.

"This seems a long way from that dinner at Redfield's, doesn't it?" he remarked, as she turned from spreading the blankets on the couch.

"It is another world," she responded, and her face took on a musing gravity.

Then they faced each other in silence, each filled with the same delicious sense of weakness, of danger, reluctant to say good-night, longing for the closer touch which dawning love demanded, and yet—something in the girl defended her, defeated him.

"You must call me if I can be of any help," he repeated, and his voice was tremulous with feeling.

"I will do so," she answered.

Still they did not part. His voice was very tender as he said, "I don't like to see you exposed to such experiences."

"I was not afraid—only for you a little," she answered.

"The Redfields like you. Eleanor told me she would gladly help you. Why do you stay here?"

"I cannot leave my mother."

"I'm not so sure of your duty in that regard. She got on without you for ten years. You have a right to consider yourself. You don't belong here."

"Neither do you," she retorted.

"Oh yes, I do—at least, the case is different with me; my work is here. It hurts me to think of going back to the hills, leaving you here in the midst of these wolves."

He was talking now in the low, throbbing utterance of a man carried out of himself. "It angers me to think that the worst of these loafers, these drunken beasts, can glare at you—can speak to you. They have no right to breathe the same air with one like you."

She did not smile at this; his voice, his eyes were filled with the gravity of the lover whose passion is not humorous. Against his training, his judgment, he was being drawn into closer and closer union with this daughter of violence, and he added: "You may not see me in the morning."

"You must not go without seeing my mother. You must have your breakfast with us. It hurt us to think you didn't come to us for supper."

Her words meant little, but the look in her eyes, the music in her voice, made him shiver. He stammered: "I—I must return to my duties to-morrow. I should go back to-night."

"You mustn't do that. You can't do that. You are to appear before the judge."

He smiled. "That is true. I'd forgotten that."

Radiant with relief, she extended her hand. "Good-night, then. You must sleep."

He took her hand and drew her toward him, then perceiving both wonder and fear in her eyes, he con-

quered himself. "Good-night," he repeated, dropping her hand, but his voice was husky with its passion.

Tired as he was, the ranger could not compose himself to sleep. The memory of the girl's sweet face, the look of half-surrender in her eyes, the knowledge that she loved him, and that she was lying but a few yards from him, made slumber impossible. At the moment she seemed altogether admirable, entirely worthy to be won.

IX

THE OLD SHEEP-HERDER

THE ranger was awakened in the first faint dawn by the passing of the girl's light feet as she went across the hall to her mother's room, and a moment later he heard the low murmur of her voice. Throwing off his blankets and making such scant toilet as he needed, he stepped into the hall and waited for her to return.

Soon she came toward him, a smile of confidence and pleasure on her lips.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Quite comfortable."

"And you?" His voice was very tender.

"I am a little tired," she acknowledged. "I didn't sleep very well."

"You didn't sleep at all," he declared, regretfully.

"Oh yes, I did," she replied, brightly.

She appeared a little pale but by no means worn. Indeed, her face had taken on new charm with its confession of feminine weakness, its expression of trust in him.

These two ardent souls confronted each other in absorbed silence with keener perception, with new daring, with new intimacy, till he recalled himself with effort.

"You must let me help you if there's anything I can do. Remember, I'm your big brother."

"I remember," she answered, smilingly, "and I'm going out to see what my big brother is to have for breakfast."

Cavanagh found the street empty, silent, and utterly commonplace. And as he walked past Halsey's saloon the tumult of the night seemed born of a vision in disordered sleep—and yet it had happened! From these reeking little dens a score of foul tatterdemalions had issued, charged with malicious fury. Each of these shacks seemed the lurking-place of a species of malevolent insect whose sting was out for every comer.

The rotting sidewalks, the tiny shops, with their dusty fly-specked windows, the groggeries, from whose open doors a noisome vapor streamed, poisoning the morning air—all these typed the old-time West as Redfield and his farmstead typed the new.

"Once I would have laughed at this town," he said; "but now it is disgusting—something to be wiped out as one expunges an obscene mark upon a public wall."

As for the attack upon himself, terrifying as it had seemed to Lee Virginia, it was in reality only another lively episode in the history of the town, another disagreeable duty in the life of a ranger. It was all a part of his job.

He went forth to his duties with a deepened conviction of the essential lawlessness of the State and of America in general; for this spirit of mob law was to be found in some form throughout the land. He was dis-

gusted, but not beaten. His resolution to carry out the terms of his contract with the Government remained unshaken.

He carried with him, also, a final disturbing glimpse of Eliza Wetherford's girl that did indeed threaten his peace of mind. There was an involuntary appeal, a wistful depth, to her glance which awakened in him an indignant pity, and also blew into flame something not so creditable—something which smoldered beneath his conscious will. He perceived in her a spirit of yielding which was difficult to resist. He understood, much more clearly than at his first meeting with her, how impossible it was for her to remain in this country (where law was a joke and women a ribald jest) without being corrupted. She had not escaped her heritage of passion, and her glances, innocent as they were, roused, even in him, something lawless.

As he climbed the long hill he grappled deeply with this new and inexplicable weakness. He had always been a decent fellow as respects women, and had maintained the same regard for the moral code that he instinctively bore toward the laws of his adopted country. He could not, therefore, regard this girl (low as her parentage seemed) in the light of license; for (he thought) whatever of evil may have been planted deep in her nature by her ill-assorted father and mother, she is at the moment sweet and fine, and the man who would awaken her other self should be accursed.

In this mood, too, he acknowledged the loneliness of his life for the first time, and rode his silent way up the trail

like one in a dream. He went over his life story in detail, wondering if he had not made a mistake in leaving England, in taking out his American citizenship. He considered again, very seriously, the question of going back to live on the estate of his mother, and once more decided that its revenue was too small. To return to it meant an acceptance of the restricted life of an English farmer, and, worst of all, an acquiescence in the social despotism which he had come to feel and to hate.

The English empire to him was falling apart. Its supremacy was already threatened by Germany, whereas the future of the States appealed to his imagination. Here the problems of popular government and of industry were to be worked out on the grandest scale. The West inspired him. "Some day each of these great ranges will be a national forest, and each of these canons will contain its lake, its reservoir." There was something fine in this vision of man's conquest of nature. "Surely in this development there is a place for me," he said.

Start at any place he pleased, his mind circled and came back to Lee Virginia. He reproached himself for not having remained one more day to help her. She was in the midst of a most bleak and difficult pass, and whether she came through or not depended on something not derived from either her father or her mother. The test of her character was being made.

"Happily the father is dead, and his exploits fading to a dim legend; but the mother may live for years to dishearten and corrupt. It is foolish of the girl to stay, and

yet to have her go would leave me and the whole valley poorer."

He perceived in her a symbol. "She is the new West just as the mother represents the old, and the law of inheritance holds in her as it holds in the State. She is a mixture of good and evil, of liberty and license. She must still draw forward, for a time, the dead weight of her past, just as the West must bear with and gradually slough off its violent moods."

His pony plodded slowly, and the afternoon was half-spent before he came in sight of the long, low log-cabin which was the only home he possessed in all America. For the first time since he built it, the station seemed lonely and disheartening. "Would any woman, for love of me, come to such a hearthstone?" he asked himself. "And if she consented to do so, could I be so selfish as to exact such sacrifice? No, the forest ranger in these attitudes must be young and heart-free; otherwise his life would be miserably solitary."

He unsaddled his horse and went about his duties with a leaden pall over his spirit, a fierce turmoil in his brain. He was no longer single-hearted in his allegiance to the forest. He could not banish that appealing girlish face, that trusting gaze. Lee Virginia needed him as he needed her; and yet—and yet—the people's lands demanded his care, his social prejudices forbade his marriage.

He was just dishing out his rude supper when the feet of a horse on the log bridge announced a visitor.

With a feeling of pleasure as well as relief, he rose to

greet the stranger. "Any visitor is welcome this night," he said.

The horseman proved to be his former prisoner, the old man Edwards, who slipped from his saddle with the never-failing grace of the cow-man, and came slowly toward the cabin. He smiled wearily as he said: "I'm on your trail, Mr. Ranger, but I bear no malice. You were doing your duty. Can you tell me how far it is to Ambro's camp?"

There was something forlorn in the man's attitude, and Cavanagh's heart softened. "Turn your horse into the corral and come to supper," he commanded, with Western bluntness; "we'll talk about all that later."

Edwards accepted his hospitality without hesitation, and when he had disposed of his mount and made himself ready for the meal, he came in and took a seat at the table in silence, while the ranger served him and waited for his explanation.

"I'm going up to take Ambro's place," he began, after a few minutes of silent eating. "Know where his camp is?"

"I do," replied Ross, to whom the stranger now appeared in pathetic guise. "Any man of his age consenting to herd sheep is surely hard hit by the rough hand of the world," he reasoned, and the closer he studied his visitor the plainlier he felt his ungoverned past. His chest was hollow, his eyes unnaturally large, and his hands thin, but he still displayed faint lines of the beauty and power he had once gloried in. His clothing was worn and poor, and Ross said: "You'll need plenty of bedding up there."

"Is it high?"

"About eleven thousand feet."

"Jehosaphat! How will I stand that kind of air? Still, it may be it's what I need. I've been living down in the low country for ten years, and I'm a little bit hide-bound."

"Lung trouble?"

"Oh no; old age, I reckon."

"You're not old—not more than fifty-five."

"I'm no colt," he admitted; "and, besides, I've lived pretty swift."

In this was the hint of a confession, but Cavanagh did not care to have him proceed further in that line. "I suppose Gregg paid your fine?"

"Yes."

"In any other town in the State you'd have gone down the line."

He roused himself. "See here, Mr. Ranger, you've no warrant to believe me, but I told you the God's truth. Young Gregg got me to ride into the range and show him the trail. I didn't intend to get mixed up with a game warden. I've had all the confinement I need."

"Well, it's a closed incident now," interposed Ross; "we won't reopen it. Make yourself at home."

The stranger, hungry as he was, ate with unexpected gentility, and, as the hot coffee sent its cheerful glow through his body, he asked, with livening interest, a good many questions about the ranger and the Forest Service. "You fellers have to be all-round men. The

cowboys think you have a snap, but I guess you earn your money."

"A man that builds trail, lays bridges, burns brush, fights fire, rides the round-up, and covers seventy-five miles of trail every week on eighty dollars per month, and feeds himself and his horses, isn't what I would call enjoying a soft snap."

"What do you do it for?"

"God knows! I've been asking myself that question all day to-day."

"This playin' game warden has some outs, too. That was a wild crowd last night. The town is the same old hell-hole it was when I knew it years ago. Fine girl of Lize Wetherford's. She blocked *me* all right." He smiled wanly. "I certainly was on my way to the green timber when she put the bars up."

Ross made no comment, and the other went on, in a tone of reminiscent sadness. "Lize has changed terribly. I used to know her when she was a girl. Judas Priest! but she could ride and shoot in those days!" His eyes kindled with the memory of her. "She could back a horse to beat any woman that ever crossed the range, but I didn't expect to see her have such a skein of silk as that girl. She sure looks the queen to me."

Cavanagh did not greatly relish this line of conversation, but the pause enabled him to say: "Miss Wetherford is not much Western; she got her training in the East. She's been with an aunt ever since her father's death."

"He's dead, is he?"

"So far as anybody knows, he is."

"Well, he's no loss. I knew him, too. He was all kinds of a fool; let a few slick ones seduce him with fizz-water and oysters on the half-shell—that's the kind of a weak sister he was. He got on the wrong side of the rustler line-up—you know all about that, I reckon? Fierce old days, those. We didn't know anything about forest rangers or game wardens in them days."

The stranger's tone was now that of a man quite certain of himself. He had become less furtive under the influence of the food and fire.

Ross defended Wetherford for Virginia's sake. "He wasn't altogether to blame, as I see it. He was the Western type in full flower, that's all. He had to go like the Indian and the buffalo. And these hobos like Ballard and Gregg will go next."

Edwards sank back into his chair. "I reckon that's right," he agreed, and made offer to help clear away the supper dishes.

"No, you're tired," replied Ross; "rest and smoke. I'll soon be done."

The poacher each moment seemed less of the hardened criminal, and more and more of the man prematurely aged by sickness and dissipation, and gradually the ranger lost all feeling of resentment.

As he sat down beside the fire, Edwards said: "Them Wetherford women think a whole lot of you. 'Pears like they'd both fight for you. Are you sweet on the girl?"

"Now, see here, old man," Ross retorted, sharply,

"you want to do a lot of thinking before you comment on Miss Wetherford. I won't stand for any nasty clack."

Edwards meekly answered: "I wasn't going to say anything out of the way. I was fixin' for to praise her."

"All the same, I don't intend to discuss her with you," was Cavanagh's curt answer.

The herder fell back into silence while the ranger prepared his bunk for the night. The fact that he transferred some of the blankets from his own bed to that of his visitor did not escape Edwards's keen eyes, and with grateful intent he said:

"I can give you a tip, Mr. Ranger," said he, breaking out of a silence. "The triangle outfit is holding more cattle on the forest than their permits call for."

"How do you know?"

"I heard one of the boys braggin' about it."

"Much obliged," responded Ross. "I'll look into it."

Edwards went on: "Furthermore, they're fixing for another sheep-kill over there, too; all the sheepmen are armed. That's why I left the country. I don't want to run any more chances of being shot up. I've had enough of trouble; I can't afford to be hobnobbing with judges and juries."

"When does your parole end?" asked Ross.

Edwards forced a grin. "I was handing you one when I said that," he declared, weakly. "I was workin' up sympathy. I'm not out on parole; I'm just a broken-down old cow-puncher herdin' sheep in order to keep clear of the liquor belt."

This seemed reasonable, and the ranger remarked, by way of dropping the subject: "I've nothing to say further than this—obey the rules of the forest, and you won't get into any further trouble with me. And as for being shot up by the cow-men, you'll not be disturbed on any national forest. There never has been a single herder shot nor a sheep destroyed on this forest."

"I'm mighty glad to hear that," replied Edwards, with sincere relief. "I've had my share of shooting up and shooting down. All I ask now is quiet and the society of sheep. I take a kind of pleasure in protecting the fool brutes. It's about all I'm good for."

He did, indeed, look like a man in the final year of life as he spoke. "Better turn in," he said, in kindlier tone; "I'm an early riser."

The old fellow rose stiffly, and, laying aside his boots and trousers, rolled into his bunk and was asleep in three minutes.

Cavanagh himself was very tired, and went to bed soon after, to sleep dreamlessly till daylight. He sprang from his bed, and after a plunge in the stream set about breakfast; while Edwards rose from his bunk, groaning and sighing, and went forth to wrangle the horses, rubbing his hands and shivering as he met the keen edge of the mountain wind. When he returned, breakfast was ready, and again he expressed his gratitude.

"Haven't you any slicker?" asked Cavanagh. "It looks like rain."

"No, I'm run down pretty low," he replied. "The

truth is, Mr. Ranger, I blew in all my wages at roulette last week."

Ross brought out a canvas coat, well worn but serviceable. "Take this along with you. It's likely to storm before we reach the sheep-camp. And you don't look very strong. You must take care of yourself."

Edwards was visibly moved by this kindness. "Sure you can spare it?"

"Certain sure; I've another," returned the ranger, curtly.

It was hardly more than sunrise as they mounted their ponies and started on their trail, which led sharply upward after they left the canon. The wind was strong and stinging cold. Over the high peaks the gray-black vapor was rushing, and farther away a huge dome of cloud was advancing like an army in action. It was all in the day's work of the ranger, but the plainsman behind him turned timorous eyes toward the sky. "It looks owly," he repeated. "I didn't know I was going so high—Gregg didn't say the camp was so near timberline."

"You've cut out a lonesome job for yourself," Ross assured him, "and if you can find anything else to do you'd better give this up and go back."

"I'm used to being lonesome," the stranger said, "but I can't stand the cold and the wet as I used to. I never was a mountaineer."

Taking pity on the shivering man, Cavanagh turned off the trail into a sheltered nook behind some twisted pine-trees. "How do you expect to take care of your

sheep a thousand feet higher than this?" he demanded as they entered the still place, where the sun shone warm.

"That's what I'm asking myself," replied Edwards. He slipped from his horse and crouched close to the rock. "My blood is mostly ditch-water, seems like. The wind blows right through me."

"How do you happen to be reduced to herding sheep? You look like a man who has seen better days."

Edwards, chafing his thin fingers to warm them, made reluctant answer: "It's a long story, Mr. Ranger, and it concerns a whole lot of other people—some of them decent folks—so I'd rather not go into it."

"John Barleycorn was involved, I reckon."

"Sure thing—he's generally always in it."

"You'd better take my gloves—it's likely to snow in half an hour. Go ahead—I'm a younger man than you are."

The other made a decent show of resistance, but finally accepted the offer, saying: "You certainly are white to me. I want to apologize for making that attempt to sneak away that night—I had a powerful good reason for not staying any longer."

Ross smiled a little. "You showed bad judgment—as it turned out."

"I sure did. That girl can shoot. Her gun was steady as a door-knob. She filled the door. Where did she learn to hold a gun like that?"

"Her father taught her, so she said."

"She wouldn't remember me—an old cuss like me—

but I've seen her with Wetherford when she was a kidlet. I never thought she'd grow up into such a 'queen.' She's a wonder."

Strange to say, Ross no longer objected to the old man's words of admiration; on the contrary, he encouraged him to talk on.

"Her courage is greater than you know. When she came to that hotel it was a place of dirt and vermin. She has transformed it. She's now engaged on the reformation of her mother."

"Lize was straight when I knew her," remarked the other, in the tone of one who wishes to defend a memory. "Straight as a die."

"In certain ways she's straight now, but she's been hard pushed at times, and has traded in liquor to help out—then she's naturally a slattern."

"She didn't used to be," asserted Edwards; "she was a mighty handsome woman when I used to see her riding around with Ed."

"She's down at the heel now, quite like the town."

"She looked sick to me. You shouldn't be too hard on a sick woman, but she ought to send her girl away or get out. As you say, the Fork is no kind of a place for such a girl. If I had a son, a fine young feller like that girl is, do you suppose I'd let him load himself up with an old soak like me? No, sir; Lize has no right to spoil that girl's life. I'm nothing but a ham-strung old cowpuncher, but I've too much pride to saddle my pack on the shoulders of my son the way Lize seems to be doin' with that girl."

He spoke with a good deal of feeling, and the ranger studied him with deepening interest. He had taken on dignity in the heat of his protest, and in his eyes blazed something that was both manly and admirable.

Cavanagh took his turn at defending Lize. "As a matter of fact, she tried to send her daughter away, but Lee refuses to go, insisting that it is her duty to remain. In spite of her bad blood the girl is surprisingly true and sweet. She makes me wonder whether there is as much in heredity as we think."

"Her blood ain't so bad. Wetherford was a fool and a daredevil, but he came of good Virginia stock—so I've heard."

"Well, whatever was good in both sire and dam this girl seems to have mysteriously gathered to herself."

The old man looked at him with a bright sidelong glance. "You are a little sweet on the girl, eh?"

Ross began to regret his confidence. "She's making a good fight, and I feel like helping her."

"And she rather likes being helped by you. I could see that when she brought the coffee to you. She likes to stand close—"

Ross cut him short. "We'll not discuss her any further."

"I don't mean any harm, Mr. Ranger; we hobos have a whole lot of time to gossip, and I'm old enough to like a nice girl in a fatherly way. I reckon the whole valley rides in to see her, just the way you do."

Cavanagh winced. "You can't very well hide a handsome woman in a cattle country."

Edwards smiled again, sadly. "Not in my day you couldn't. Why, a girl like that would 'a' been worth a thousand head o' steers. I've seen a man come in with a span of mules and three ordinary female daughters, and without cinching a saddle to a pony accumulate five thousand cattle." Then he grew grave again. "Don't happen to have a picture of the girl, do you?"

"If I did, would I show it to you?"

"You might. You might even give it to me."

Cavanagh looked at the man as if he were dreaming. "You must be crazy."

"Oh no, I'm not. Sheep-herders do go twisted, but I'm not in the business long enough for that. I'm just a bit nutty about that girl."

He paused a moment. "So if you have a picture, I wish you'd show it to me."

"I haven't any."

"Is that right?"

"That's right. I've only seen her two or three times, and she isn't the kind that distributes her favors."

"So it seems. And yet you're just the kind of figure to catch a girl's eye. She likes you—I could see that, but you've got a good opinion of yourself. You're an educated man—do you intend to marry her?"

"See here, Mr. Sheep-herder, you better ride on up to your camp," and Ross turned to mount his horse.

"Wait a minute," called the other man, and his voice surprised the ranger with a note of authority. "I was terribly taken with that girl, and I owe you a whole lot; but I've got to know one thing. I can see you're

full of her, and jealous as a bear of any other suitor. Now I want to know whether you intend to marry her or whether you're just playing with her?"

Ross was angry now. "What I intend to do is none of your business."

The other man was suddenly ablaze with passion. His form had lost its stoop. His voice was firm. "I merely want to say that if you play the goat with that girl, I'll kill you!"

Ross stared at him quite convinced that he had gone entirely mad. "That's mighty chivalrous of you, Mr. Sheep-herder," he replied, cuttingly; "but I'm at a loss to understand this sudden indignation on your part."

"You needn't be—I'm her father!"

Cavanagh fairly reeled before this retort. His head rang as if he had been struck with a club. He perceived the truth of the man's words instantly. He gasped: "Good God, man! are *you* Ed Wetherford?"

The answer was quick. "That's who I am!" Then his voice changed. "But I don't want the women to know I'm alive—I didn't intend to let anybody know it. My fool temper has played hell with me again"—then his voice grew firmer—"all the same, I mean it. If you or any man tries to abuse her, I'll kill him! I've loaded her up with trouble, as you say, but I'm going to do what I can to protect her—now that I'm in the county again."

Ross, confused by this new complication in the life of the girl he was beginning to love, stared at his companion

in dismay. Was it not enough that Virginia's mother should be a slattern and a termagant? At last he spoke: "Where have you been all these years?"

"In the Texas 'pen.' I served nine years there."

"What for?"

"Shooting a man. It was a case of self-defence, but his family had more money and influence than I did, so I went down the road. As soon as I was out I started north—just the way a dog will point toward home. I didn't intend to come here, but some way I couldn't keep away. I shied round the outskirts of the Fork, picking up jobs of sheep-herding just to have time to turn things over. I know what you're thinking about—you're saying to yourself, 'Well, here's a nice father-in-law?' Well, now, I don't know anything about your people, but the Wetherfords are as good as anybody. If I hadn't come out into this cursed country, where even the women go shootin' wild, I would have been in Congress; but being hot-headed, I must mix in. I'm not excusing myself, you understand; I'm not a desirable addition tc any man's collection of friends, but I can promise you this—no one but yourself shall ever know who I am. At the same time, you can't deceive my girl without my being named in the funeral that will follow."

It was a singular place for such an exchange of confidences. Wetherford stood with his back against his pony, his face flushed, his eyes bright as though part of his youth had returned to him, while the ranger, slender, erect, and powerful, faced him with sombre glance. Overhead the detached clouds swept swift as eagles,

casting shadows cold as winter, and in the dwarfed century-old trees the wind breathed a sad monody. Occasionally the sun shone warm and golden upon the group, and then it seemed spring, and the far-off plain a misty sea.

At last Cavanagh said: "You are only a distant and romantic figure to Lee—a part of the dead past. She remembers you as a bold rider and a wondrously brave and chivalrous father."

"Does she?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, and she loves to talk of you. She knows the town's folk despise your memory, but that she lays to prejudice."

"She must never know. You must promise never to tell her."

"I promise that," Cavanagh said, and Edwards went on:

"If I could bring something to her—prove to her I'm still a man—it might do to tell her, but I'm a branded man now, and an old man, and there's no hope for me. I worked in one of the machine-shops down there, and it took the life out of me. Then, too, I left a bad name here in the Fork—I know that. Those big cattle-men fooled me into taking their side of the war. I staked everything I had on them, and then they railroaded me out of the county. So, you see, I'm double-crossed, no matter where I turn."

Every word he uttered made more apparent to Cavanagh that Lee Virginia would derive nothing but pain and disheartenment from a knowledge that her father

lived. "She must be spared this added burden of shameful inheritance," he decided.

The other man seemed to understand something of the ranger's indignant pity, for he repeated: "I want you to *swear* not to let Lee know I'm alive, no matter what comes; she must not be saddled with my record. Let her go on thinking well of me. Give me your word!" He held out an insistent palm.

Ross yielded his hand, and in spite of himself his tenderness for the broken man deepened. The sky was darkening to the west, and with a glance upward he said: "I reckon we'd better make your camp soon or you'll be chilled to the bone."

They mounted hastily and rode away, each feeling that his relationship to the other had completely changed. Wetherford marvelled over the evident culture and refinement of the ranger. "He's none too good for her, no matter who he is," he said.

Upon leaving timber-line they entered upon a wide and sterile slope high on the rocky breast of the great peak, whose splintered crest lorded the range. Snow-fields lay all about, and a few hundred feet higher up the canons were filled with ice. It was a savage and tempest-swept spot in which to pitch a tent, but there among the rocks shivered the minute canvas home of the shepherd, and close beside it, guarded by a lone dog, and lying like a thick-spread flock of rimy bowlders (almost unnoticeable in their silent immobility) huddled the sheep.

"There's your house," shouted Ross to Wetherford.

The older man, with white face of dismay, looked about him, unable to make reply.

The walls of the frail teepee, flapping in the breeze, appeared hardly larger than a kerchief caught upon a bush, and the disheartened collie seemed nervously apprehensive of its being utterly swept away. The great peaks were now hid by the rain, and little could be seen but wet rocks, twisted junipers, and the trickling gray streams of icy water. The eastern landscape was naked, alpine, splendid yet appalling, and the voices of the sheep added to the dreary message of the scene.

"Hello there!" shouted Ross, wondering at the absence of human life about the camp. "Hello the house!"

Receiving no answer to his hail, he turned to Wetherford. "Looks like Joe has pulled out and left the collie to 'tend the flock. He's been kind o' seedy for some days."

Dismounting, he approached the tent. The collie, who knew him, seemed to understand his errand, for he leaped upon him as if to kiss his cheek. Ross put him down gently. "You're almost too glad to see me, old fellow. I wonder how long you've been left here alone?"

Thereupon he opened the tied flap, but started back with instant perception of something wrong, for there, on his pile of ragged quilts, lay the Basque herder, with flushed face and rolling eyes, crazed with fever and entirely helpless. "You'd better not come in here, Wetherford," Ross warned. "Joe is here, horribly sick, and I'm afraid it's something contagious. It may be smallpox."

Wetherford recoiled a step. "Smallpox! What makes you think that?"

"Well, these Basques have been having it over in their settlement, and, besides, it smells like it." He listened a moment. "I'm afraid Joe's in for it. He's crazy with it. But he's a human being, and we can't let him die here alone. You rustle some wood for the stove, and I'll see what I can do for him."

Wetherford was old and wasted and thin-blooded, but he had never been a coward, and in his heart there still burned a small flame of his youthful, reckless, generous daring. Pushing Cavanagh one side, he said, with firm decision: "You keep out o' there. I'm the one to play nurse. This is my job."

"Nonsense; I am younger and stronger than you."

"Get away!" shouted the older man. "Gregg hired me to do this work, and it don't matter whether I live or die; but you've got something to do in the world. My girl needs you, and she don't need me, so get out o' here and stay out. Go bring me that wood, and I'll go in and see what's the matter."

Cavanagh looked him in the face an instant. "Very well," said he, "I'll do as you say. There's no use of our both taking chances."

It was beginning to rain, and the tent was dark and desolate, but as the fire in the little stove commenced to snarl, and the smoke to pour out of the pipe, the small domicile took on cheer. Wetherford knew how to care for the sick, and in the shelter of the canvas wall developed unforeseen vigor and decision. It was

amazing to Cavanagh to witness his change of manner.

Soon a pan of water was steaming, and some hot stones were at the sufferer's feet, and when Wetherford appeared at the door of the tent his face was almost happy. "Kill a sheep. There isn't a thing but a heel of bacon and a little flour in the place."

As the ranger went about his outside duties he had time to take into full account the tragic significance of the situation. He was not afraid of death, but the menace of sickness under such surroundings made his blood run cold. It is such moments as these that the wilderness appalls. Twenty miles of most difficult trail lay between his own cabin and this spot. To carry the sick man on his horse would not only be painful to the sufferer but dangerous to the rescuer, for if the Basque were really ill of smallpox contagion would surely follow. On the other hand, to leave him to die here unaided seemed inhuman, impossible.

"There is only one thing to do," he called to Wetherford, "and that is for me to ride back to the station and bring up some extra bedding and my own tent, and so camp down beside you."

"All right; but remember I've established a quarantine. I'll crack your head if you break over the line an inch."

There was no longer any feeling of reaching up or reaching down between the two men—they were equals. Wetherford, altogether admirable, seemed to have regained his manhood as he stood in the door of the tent

confronting the ranger. "This Basque ain't much of a find, but, as you say, he's human, and we can't let him lie here and die. I'll stay with him till you can find a doctor or till he dies."

"I take off my hat to you," responded Cavanagh. "You are a man."

X

THE SMOKE OF THE BURNING

THE reader will observe that the forest ranger's job is that of a man and a patriot, and such a ranger was Cavanagh, notwithstanding his foreign birth. He could ride all day in the saddle and fight fire all night. While not a trained forester, he was naturally a reader, and thoroughly understood the theories of the department. As a practical ranger he stood half-way between the cowboy (who was at first the only available material) and the trained expert who is being educated to follow him.

He was loyal with the loyalty of a soldier, and his hero was the colonel of the Rough-riders, under whom he had campaigned. The second of his admirations was the Chief Forester of the department.

The most of us are getting so thin-skinned, so dependent upon steam-heat and goloshes, that the actions of a man like this riding forth upon his trail at all hours of the day and night self-sufficing and serene, seem like the doings of an epic, and so indeed they are.

On the physical side the plainsman, the cowboy, the poacher, are all admirable, but Cavanagh went far beyond their physical hardihood. He dreamed, as he rode, of his responsibilities. The care of the poor Basque

shepherd he had accepted as a matter of routine without Wetherford's revelation of himself, which complicated an exceedingly pitiful case. He could not forget that it was Lee Virginia's father who stood in danger of contracting the deadly disease, and as he imagined him dying far up there on that bleak slope, his heart pinched with the tragedy of the old man's life. In such wise the days of the ranger were smouldering to this end.

On the backward trail he turned aside to stamp out a smoking log beside a deserted camp-fire, and again he made a detour into a lovely little park to visit a fisherman and to warn him of the danger of fire. He was the forest guardian, alert to every sign, and yet all the time he was being drawn on toward his temptation. Why not resign and go East, taking the girl with him? "After all, the life up here is a lonely and hard one, in no sense a vocation for an ambitious man. Suppose I am promoted to Forest Supervisor? That only means a little more salary and life in a small city rather than here. District Supervisor would be better, but can I hope to secure such a position?"

Up to this month he had taken the matter of his promotion easily; it was something to come along in the natural course of things. "There is no haste; I can wait." Now haste seemed imperative. "I am no longer so young as I was," he admitted.

Once back at his cabin he laid aside his less tangible problems, and set himself to cooking some food to take back with him to the peak. He brought in his packhorse, and burdened him with camp outfit and utensils,

and extra clothing. He filled his pockets with such medicines as he possessed, and so at last, just as night was falling, he started back over his difficult trail.

The sky was black as the roof of a cavern, for the stars were hid by a roof of cloud which hung just above his head, and the ranger was obliged to feel his way through the first quarter of his journey. The world grew lighter after he left the canon and entered the dead timber of the glacial valley, but even in the open the going was wearisome and the horses proceeded with sullen caution.

"The Basque is a poor, worthless little peasant, but he is a human being, and to leave him to die up there would be monstrous," he insisted, as the horses stumbled upward over the rocks of a vast lateral moraine toward the summit, blinded by the clouds through which they were forced to pass. He was dismounted now and picking his way with a small lantern, whose feeble ray (like that of a firefly) illuminated for a small space the dripping rocks; all else was tangible yellow mist which possessed a sulphurous odor and clung to everything it touched. The wind had died out entirely, and the mountain-side was as silent as the moon.

Foot by foot he struggled up the slope, hoping each moment to break through this blanket of vapor into the clear air. He knew from many previous experiences that the open sky existed a little way above, that this was but a roof.

At last he parted the layer of mist and burst into the moonlit heights above. He drew a deep breath of awe as he turned and looked about him. Overhead the

sky was sparkling with innumerable stars, and the crescent moon was shining like burnished silver, while level with his breast rolled a limitless, silent, and mystical ocean of cloud which broke against the dark peaks in soundless surf, and spread away to the east in ever-widening shimmer. All the lesser hills were covered; only the lords of the range towered above the flood in sullen and unmoved majesty.

For a long time Cavanagh stood beside his weary horses, filling his soul with the beauty of this world, so familiar yet so transformed. He wished for his love; she would feel and know and rejoice with him. It was such experiences as these that made him content with his work. For the ranger Nature plays her profoundest dramas—sometimes with the rush of winds, the crash of thunder; sometimes like this, in silence so deep that the act of breathing seems a harsh, discordant note.

Slowly the mystic waters fell away, sinking with slightly rolling action into the valleys, and out of the wool-white waves sudden sharp dark forms upthrust like strange masters of the deep. Towers took shape and islands upheaved, crowned with dark fortresses. To the west a vast and inky-black Gibraltar magically appeared. Soon the sea was but a prodigious river flowing within the high walls of an ancient glacier, a ghost of the icy stream that once ground its slow way between these iron cliffs.

With a shudder of awe the ranger turned from the intolerable beauty of this combination of night, cloud, and mountain-crest, and resumed his climb. Such scenes,

by their majesty, their swift impermanency, their colossal and heedless haste, made his heart ache with indefinable regret. Again and again he looked back, longing for some power which would enable him to record and reproduce for the eyes of his love some part of this stupendous and noiseless epic. He was no longer content to enjoy Nature's splendors alone.

On the cold and silent side of the great divide the faint light of the shepherd's teepee shone, and with a returning sense of his duty to his fellows on the roof of the continent, Cavanagh pushed onward.

Wetherford met him at the door, no longer the poor old tramp, but a priest, one who has devoted himself to Christ's service.

"How is he?" asked the ranger.

"Delirious," replied the herder. "I've had to hold him to his bed. I'm glad you've come. It's lonesome up here. Don't come too near. Set your tent down there by the trees. I can't have you infected. Keep clear of me and this camp."

"I've got some food and some extra clothing for you."

"Put 'em down here, and in the morning drive these sheep away. That noise disturbs the dago, and I don't like it myself; they sound lonesome and helpless. That dog took 'em away for a while, but brought 'em back again; poor devil, he don't know what to think of it all."

Ross did as Wetherford commanded him to do, and withdrew a little way down the slope; and without putting up his tent, rolled himself in his blankets and went to sleep.

The sun rose gloriously. With mountain fickleness the wind blew gently from the east, the air was precisely like late March, and the short and tender grass, the small flowers in the sheltered corners of the rocks, and the multitudinous bleatings of the lambs were all in keeping. It was spring in the world and it was spring in the heart of the ranger, in spite of all his perplexities. The Basque would recover, the heroic ex-convict would not be stricken, and all would be well. Of such resiliency is the heart of youth.

His first duty was to feed the faithful collie, and to send him forth with the flock. His next was to build a fire and cook some breakfast for Wetherford, and as he put it down beside the tent door he heard the wild pleading of the Basque, who was struggling with his nurse—doubtless in the belief that he was being kept a prisoner. Only a few words like "go home" and "sheep" were intelligible to either the nurse or the ranger.

"Keep quiet now—quiet, boy! It's all right. I'm here to take care of you," Wetherford repeated, endlessly.

Cavanagh waited till a silence came; then called, softly: "Here's your breakfast, Wetherford."

"Move away," retorted the man within. "Keep your distance."

Ross walked away a little space and Wetherford came to the door. "The dago is sure sick, there's no two ways about that. How far is it to the nearest doctor?"

"I could reach one by 'phone from the Kettle Ranch, about twenty miles below here."

"If he don't get better to-day I reckon we'll have to

have a doctor." He looked so white and old that Cavanagh said:

"You need rest. Now I *think* I've had the smallpox —I know I've been vaccinated, and if you go to bed—"

"If you're saying all that preliminary to offering to come in here, you're wasting your breath. I don't intend to let you come any nearer than you are. There is work for you to do. Besides, there's my girl; you're detailed to look after her."

"Would a doctor come?" asked Ross, huskily, moved by Wetherford's words. "It's a hard climb. Would they think the dago worth it?"

Wetherford's face darkened with a look of doubt. "It *is* a hard trip for a city man, but maybe he would come for you—for the Government."

"I doubt it, even if I were to offer my next month's salary as a fee. These hills are very remote to the townsfolk, and one dago more or less of no importance, but I'll see what I can do."

Ross was really more concerned for Wetherford himself than for the Basque. "If the fever is something malignant, we must have medical aid," he said, and went slowly back to his own camp to ponder his puzzling problem.

One thing could certainly be done, and that was to inform Gregg and Murphy of their herder's illness; surely they would come to the rescue of the collie and his flock. To reach a telephone involved either a ride over into Deer Creek or a return to the Fork. He was tempted to ride all the way to the Fork, for to do so would

permit another meeting with Lee; but to do this would require many hours longer, and half a day's delay might prove fatal to the Basque, and, besides, each hour of loneliness and toil rendered Wetherford just so much more open to the deadly attack of the disease.

Here was the tragic side of the wilderness. At such moments even the Fork seemed a haven. The mountains offer a splendid camping-place for the young and the vigorous, but they are implacable foes to the disabled man or the aged. They do not give loathsome diseases like pox, but they do not aid in defence of the sick. Coldly aloof, the clouds sail by. The night winds bite. The rains fall remorselessly. Sheltering rocks there are, to be sure, but their comfort is small to the man smitten with the scourge of the crowded city. In such heights man is of no more value than the wolf or the cony.

It was hard to leave an old and broken man in such a drear and wind-contested spot, and yet it had to be done. So fastening his tent securely behind a clump of junipers, Cavanagh mounted his horse and rode away across the boundary of the forest into the Deer Creek Basin, which had been the bone of much contention for nearly four years.

It was a high, park-like expanse, sparsely wooded, beautiful in summer, but cold and bleak in winter. The summers were short, and frost fell almost every week even in July and August. It had once been a part of the forest, but under pressure the President had permitted it to be restored to the public lands open for entry. It was

not "agricultural grounds," as certain ranchers claimed, but it was excellent summer pasture, and the sheepmen and cattle-men had leaped at once into warfare to possess it. Sheep were beaten to death with clubs by hundreds, herders were hustled out of the park with ropes about their necks and their outfits destroyed—and all this within a few miles of the forest boundary, where one small sentinel kept effective watch and ward.

Cavanagh had never been over this trail but once, and he was trying to locate the cliff from which a flock of sheep had been hurled by cattle-men some years before, when he perceived a thin column of smoke rising from a rocky hillside. With habitual watchfulness as to fire, he raised his glass to his eyes and studied the spot. It was evidently a camp-fire and smouldering dangerously, and turning his horse's head he rode toward it to stamp it out. It was not upon his patrol; but that did not matter, his duty was clear.

As he drew near he began to perceive signs of a broken camp; the ground was littered with utensils. It was not an ordinary camp-fire, and the ranger's heart quickened. "Another sheep-herder has been driven out, and his tent and provisions burned!" he exclaimed, wrathfully.

His horse snorted and shied as he rode nearer, and then a shudder passed through the ranger's heart as he perceived in the edge of the smouldering embers a boot heel, and then—*a charred hand!* In the smoke of that fire was the reek of human flesh.

For a long time the ranger sat on his horse, peering

down into those ashes until at last it became evident to his eyes that at least two sheep-herders had been sacrificed on the cattle-man's altar of hate and greed.

All about on the sod the story was written, all too plain. Two men, possibly three, had been murdered—cut to pieces and burned—not many hours before. There stood the bloody spade with which the bodies had been dismembered, and there lay an empty can whose oil had been poured upon the mingled camp utensils, tent, and wagon of the herders, in the attempt to incinerate the hacked and dismembered limbs of the victims. The lawlessness of the range had culminated. The ferocity of the herder had gone beyond the savage. Here in the sweet autumn air the reek of the cattle-man's vengeance rose like some hideous vapor, poisonous and obscene.

The ranger sickened as the bloody tale unfolded itself before him. Then a fierce hate of such warfare flamed in his heart. Could this enormity be committed under any other civilized flag? Would any other Government intermingle so foolishly, so childishly its State and Federal authority as to permit such diabolism?

Here lay the legitimate fruit of the State's essential hoodlumism. Here was the answer to local self-government—to democracy. Such a thing could not happen in Australia or Canada; only in America could lynch law become a dramatic pastime, a jest, an instrument of private vengeance. The South and the West were alike stained with the blood of the lynched, and the whole nation was covered with shame.

In his horror, his sense of revolt, he cursed the State of

which he was a citizen. He would have resigned his commission at the moment, so intense was his resentment of the supine, careless, jovial, slattern Government under which he was serving.

"By the Lord!" he breathed, with solemn intensity, "if this does not shame the people of this State into revolt, if these fiends are not hounded and hung, I will myself harry them. I cannot live and do my duty here unless this crime is avenged by law."

It did not matter to him that these herders were poor Basques; it was the utter, horrifying, destructive disregard of law which raised such tumult in his blood. His English education, his soldier's training, his native refinement—all were outraged. Then, too, he loved the West. He had surrendered his citizenship under the British flag—for this!

Chilled, shaking, and numb, he set spurs to his horse and rode furiously down the trail toward the nearest town, so eager to spread the alarm that he could scarcely breathe a deep breath. On the steep slopes he was forced to walk, and his horse led so badly, that his agony of impatience was deepened. He had a vision of the murderers riding fast into far countries. Each hour made their apprehension progressively the more difficult.

"Who were they?" he asked himself, again and again. "What kind of man did this thing? Was the leader a man like Ballard? Even so, he was hired. By whom? By ranchers covetous of the range; that was absolutely certain."

It was long after noon before he came to the end of the telephone-line in a little store and post-office at the upper falls of Deer Creek. The telephone had a booth fortunately, and he soon had Redfield's ear, but his voice was so strained and unnatural that his chief did not recognize it.

"Is that you, Ross? What's the matter? Your voice sounds hoarse."

Ross composed himself, and told his story briefly. "I'm at Kettle Ranch post-office. Now listen. The limit of the cattle-man's ferocity has been reached. As I rode down here, to get into communication with a doctor for a sick herder, I came upon the scene of another murder and burning. The fire is still smouldering; at least two bodies are in the embers."

At last, bit by bit, from hurried speech, the supervisor derived the fact, the location, the hour, and directed the herder to ride back and guard the remains till the sheriff arrived.

"Keep it all quiet," warned Ross, "and get the sheriff and a doctor to come up here as quick as you can. What in the name of God is this country coming to?" he cried, in despair. "Will this deed go unpunished, like the rest?"

Redfield's voice had lost its optimistic ring. "I don't know; I am stunned by it all. Don't do anything rash, Ross. Wait till I come. Perhaps this is the turning-point out here. I'll be up at the earliest moment."

The embittered and disheartened ranger then called up Lee Virginia, and the sound of her sweet voice turned

his thoughts to other and, in a sense, more important matters; for when she heard his name she cried out with such eager longing and appeal that his heart leaped. "Oh, I wish you were here! Mother has been worse to-day. She is asking for you. Can't you come down and see us? She wants to tell you something."

"I can't—I can't!" he stammered. "I—I—I'm a long way off, and I have important work to do. Tell her I will come to-morrow."

Her voice was filled with disappointment and fear as she said: "Oh, I need you so! Can't you come?"

"Yes, I will come as soon as I can. I will try to reach you by daylight to-morrow. My heart is with you. Call up the Redfields; they will help you."

"Mother wants *you*. She says she *must* see you. Come as soon as you can. I don't know what she wants to tell you—but I do know we need you."

Her meaning was as clear as if she said: "I need you, for I love you. Come to me." And her prayer filled him with pain as well as pleasure. He was a soldier and under orders from his chief, therefore he said: "Dear girl, there is a sick man far up on the mountain-side with no one to care for him but a poor old herder who is in danger of falling sick himself. I must go back to them; but, believe me, I will come just as soon as my duties will let me. You understand me, don't you?"

Her voice was fainter as she said: "Yes, but I—it seems hard to wait."

"I know. Your voice has helped me. I was in a

black mood when I came here. I'm going back now to do my work, and then I will come to you. Good-bye."

Strangely beautiful and very subtle was the vibrant stir of that wire as it conveyed back to his ear the little sigh with which she made answer to his plea. He took his way upward in a mood which was meditative but no longer bitter.

XI

SHADOWS ON THE MIST

THE decision which Cavanagh made between love and duty distinguished the officer from the man, the soldier from the civilian. He did not hesitate to act, and yet he suffered a mental conflict as he rode back toward the scene of that inhuman sacrifice on the altar of greed. His heart went out to Lee Virginia in longing. Her appealing voice still lay in his ear with an effect like the touch of her soft lips, and his flagging horse suffered from the unconscious pressure of his haste.

"It will be hours before any part of the sheriff's posse can reach the falls, even though they take to the swiftest motors, and then other long hours must intervene before I can ride down to her. Yes, at least a day and a night must drag their slow course before I can hope to be of service to her," and the thought drew a groan of anxiety from him. At such moments of mental stress the trail is a torture and the mountain-side an inexorable barrier.

Half-way to the hills he was intercepted by an old man who was at work on an irrigating ditch beside the road. He seemed very nervous and very inquisitive, and as he questioned the ranger his eyes were like those of a dog

that fears his master's hand. Ross wondered about this afterward, but at the moment his mind was busy with the significance of this patient toiler with a spade. He was a prophetic figure in the most picturesque and sterile land of the stockman. "Here within twenty miles of this peaceful fruit-grower," he said, "is the crowning infamy of the free-booting cowboy. My God, what a nation we are!"

He wondered, as he rode on, whether the papers of the State would make a jest of *this* deed. "Will this be made the theme for caustic comment in the Eastern press for a day, and then be forgotten?"

As his hot blood cooled he lost faith in even this sacrifice. Could anything change the leopard West into the tameness and serenity of the ox? "No," he decided, "nothing but death will do that. This generation, these fierce and bloody hearts, must die; only in that way can the tradition of violence be overcome and a new State reared."

At the foot of the toilsome, upward-winding trail he dismounted, and led his weary horse. Over his head, and about half-way to the first hilltop, lay a roof of fleecy vapor, faint purple in color and seamless in texture. Through this he must pass, and it symbolized to him the line of demarkation between the plain and the mountain, between order and violence.

Again he rose above it, to find it a fantastic sea lit by the sun, and glowing with pink and gold and violet. Celestial in its ethereal beauty, it threw into still more appalling shadow the smoking altar of passion toward

which he spurred. From moment to moment the surface rose and shifted in swift, tumultuous, yet soundless waves, breaking round pine-clad promontories in shimmering breakers, faint, and far, and serene.

Down through a deep canon to the south a prodigious river of mist was rushing, a silent cataract of ashy vapor plunging to a soundless beach. Above and beyond it the high peaks shone in radiance so pure that the heart of the lover ached with the pain of its evanescent beauty. It was as if he were looking across a foaming flood upon the stupendous and shining park of some imperial potentate whose ornate and splendid country home lay just beyond. Rocky spires rose like cathedral towers, and fortresses abutted upon the stream. And yet in the midst of that glorified plain the smoke of the burning rose.

Slowly he led his horse along the mountain-side, grasping with eager desire at every changing aspect of this marvellous scene. It was infinitely more gorgeous, more compelling, than his moonlight experience the night before, for here reality, definite and powerful, was interfused with mystery. These foot-hills, hitherto pleasantly precipitous, had suddenly become grandiose. All was made over upon a mightier scale, each rock and tree being distorted by the passing translucent clouds into a kind of monstrous yet epic proportion.

Ghostly white ledges broke from the darker mist like fields of distant crusted snow. Castellated crags loomed from the mystic river like fortified islands. Cattle, silent, enormously aggrandized, emerged like fabled beasts of

the eld, and stared upon him, their jaws dripping with dew. Bulls roared from the obscure deeps. Dead trees, with stark and sinister arms, menaced warningly. All was as unreal as the world of pain's delirium, and yet was as beautiful as the poet's vision; and the ranger, feeling that he was looking upon one of Nature's rarest displays, removed his hat in worship of it, thrilling with pride and satisfaction over the thought that this was his domain, his to guard and preserve.

The crowning glow of mystery and grace came as he led his horse out upon a projecting point of rocky ledge to rest. Here the cliff descended abruptly to an enormous depth, and upon the vaporous rolling flood beneath him a dome of darker shadow rested. At the summit of this shadow an aureole of rainbow light, a complete and glorious circle rested, in the midst of which his own image was flung, grotesque and gigantic.

"The Shadows of the Brocken!" he exclaimed, in ecstasy, all his bitterness, his care, forgotten. "Now I understand Goethe's lines." In all his life in the hills he had never before witnessed such a combination of peak and sun and cloud and shadow.

His love for the range came back upon him with such power that tears misted his eyes and his throat ached. "Where else will I find such scenes as this?" he asked himself. "Where in all the lowlands could such splendors shine? How can I leave this high world in which these wonders come and go? I will not! Here will I bring my bride and build my home. This is my world."

But the mist grew gray, the aureole of fire faded, the

sun went down behind the hills, and the chill of evening deepened on the trail, and as he reapproached the scene of man's inhumanity to man the thought of camping there beside those charred limbs called for heroic resolution. He was hungry, too, and as the air pinched, he shivered.

"At the best, the sheriff cannot reach here before midnight," he said, and settled down to his unsought, revolting vigil.

His one relief lay in the mental composition of a long letter to Lee Virginia, whose life at that moment was a comfort to him. "If such purity, such sweetness, can come from violence and vulgarity, then surely a new and splendid State can rise even out of the ashes of these murdered men. Perhaps this is the end of the old," he mused, "perhaps this is the beginning of the new," and as he pondered the last faint crimson died out of the west. "So must the hate and violence die out of America," he said, "leaving the clear, sweet air of liberty behind."

He was near to the poet at the moment, for he was also the lover. His allegiance to the great republic stood the test. His faith in democracy was shaken, but not destroyed. "I will wait," he decided. "This shall be the sign. If this deed goes unavenged, then will I put off my badge and my uniform, and go back to the land where for a hundred years at least such deeds as these have been impossible."

He built a fire, as night fell, to serve both as beacon and as a defence against the cold. He felt himself weirdly remote in this vigil. From his far height he looked

abroad upon the tumbled plain as if upon an ocean dimly perceptible yet august. "At this moment," he said, "curious and perhaps guilty eyes are wondering what my spark of firelight may mean."

His mind went again and again to that tall old man in the ditch. What was the meaning of his scared and sorrowful glance? Why should one so peacefully employed at such a time and in such a place wear the look of a hunted deer? What meant the tremor in his voice?

Was it possible that one so gentle should have taken part in this deed? "Preposterous suspicion, and yet he had a guilty look."

He was not a believer in ghosts, but he came nearer to a fear of the dark that night than ever before in his life. He brought his horse close to the fire for company, and was careful not to turn his back upon the dead. A corpse lying peacefully would not have produced this overpowering horror. He had seen battle-fields, but this pile of mangled limbs conquered even the hardened campaigner. He shivered each time his memory went back to what he had first looked upon—the charred hand, the helpless heel.

From his high hill of meditation he reviewed the history of the West. Based in bloody wars between the primitive races, and between the trappers and their allies, the land had passed through a thin adumbration of civilization as the stockmen drove out the buffalo and their hunters. Vigilantes, sheriff's posses (and now and again the regular army) had swept over these grassy swells on errands of retributory violence, and so the territory had been

divided at last into populous States. Then politics, the great national game, had made of them a power, with Senators to represent a mere handful of miners and herdsmen. In the Congress of the United States these commonwealths had played their unscrupulous games, trading for this and for that local appropriation. Happily in some instances these Senators had been higher than their State, but in other cases they represented only too loyally the violent and conscienceless cow-man or lumber king, and now, as Redfield had said, the land-boomer was to have his term. The man who valued residents, not Wild West performers, was about to govern and despoil; this promoter, almost as selfish as the cattle king, was about to advance the State along the lines of *his* conception of civilization; and so, perhaps, this monstrous deed, this final inexcusable inhuman offence against law and humanity, was to stand as a monument dividing the old from the new. Such, at least, was the ranger's hope.

At last, far in the night, he heard the snort of a horse and the sound of voices. The law (such as it was) was creeping up the mountain-side in the person of the sheriff of Chauvenet County, and was about to relieve the ranger from his painful responsibility as guardian of the dead.

At last he came, this officer of the law, attended (like a Cheyenne chief) by a dozen lesser warriors of various conditions and kinds, but among them—indeed, second only to the sheriff—was Hugh Redfield, the Forest Supervisor, hot and eager with haste.

As they rode up to the fire, the officer called out: "Howdy, ranger! How about it?"

Ross stated briefly, succinctly, what he had discovered; and as he talked other riders came up the hill and gathered closely around to listen in wordless silence—in guilty silence, the ranger could not help believing.

The sheriff, himself a cattle-man, heard Cavanagh without comment till he had ended with a gesture. "And there they are; I turn them over to you with vast relief. I am anxious to go back to my own peaceful world, where such things do not happen."

The sheriff removed his hat and wiped his brow, then swore with a mutter of awe. "Well, by God, this is the limit! You say there were three bodies?"

"I lacked the courage to sort them out. I've been in battle, Mr. Sheriff, and I've seen dead men tumbled in all shapes, but someway this took the stiffening out of my knees. I rode away and left them. I don't care to see them again. My part of this work is done."

Redfield spoke. "Sheriff Van Horne, you and I have been running cattle in this country for nearly thirty years, and we've witnessed all kinds of shooting and several kinds of hanging, but when it comes to chopping and burning men, I get off. I shall personally offer a reward of a thousand dollars for the apprehension of these miscreants, and I hope you'll make it your solemn duty to hunt them to earth."

"You won't have far to go," remarked Ross, significantly.

"What do you mean?" asked the sheriff.

"I mean this slaughter, like the others that have

taken place, was the work of cattle-men who claim this range. Their names are known to us all."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Redfield, looking round at the silent throng, and in the wavering light certain eyes seemed to shift and fall.

"In what essential does it differ from the affair over on the Red Desert?" demanded Cavanagh. "Who would kill these poor sheep-herders but cattle-men warring for the grass on which we stand?"

"But they would not dare to do such work themselves."

"No one else would do it. Hired assassins would not chop and burn. Hate and greed were both involved in this butchery—hate and greed made mad by drink. I tell you, the men who did this are less than a day's ride of where we stand."

A silence followed—so deep a silence that the ranger was convinced of the fact that in the circle of his listeners stood those who, if they had not shared in the slaughter, at least knew the names of the guilty men.

At last the sheriff spoke, this time with a sigh. "I hope you're all wrong, Cavanagh. I'd hate to think any constituent of mine had sanctioned this job. Give me that lantern, Curtis."

The group of ranchers dismounted, and followed the sheriff over to the grewsome spot; but Redfield stayed with the ranger.

"Have you any suspicion, Ross?"

"No, hardly a suspicion. However, you know as well as I that this was not a sudden outbreak. This

deed was planned. It represents the feeling of many cattle-men—in everything but the extra horror of its execution. *That* was the work of drunken, infuriated men. But I am more deeply concerned over Miss Wetherford's distress. Did she reach you by telephone to-night?"

"No. What's the trouble?"

"Her mother is down again. I telephoned her, and she asked me to come to her, but I cannot go, for I have a case of smallpox up on the hill. Ambro, the Basque herder, is down with it, and another herder is up there alone with him. I must go back to them. But meanwhile I wish you would go to the Fork and see what you can do for her."

His voice, filled with emotion, touched Redfield, and he said: "Can't I go to the relief of the herder?"

"No, you must not think of it; you are a man of a family. But if you can find any one who has had the smallpox send him up; the old herder who is nursing the patient is not strong, and may drop any moment. Then it's up to me."

The men came back to the camp-fire conversing in low voices, some of them cursing in tones of awe. One or two of them were small farmers from Deer Creek, recent comers to the State, or men with bunches of milk-cows, and to them this deed was awesome.

The sheriff followed, saying: "Well, there's nothing to do but wait till morning. The rest of you men better go home. You can't be of any use here."

For more than three hours the sheriff and Redfield sat

with the ranger waiting for daylight, and during this time the name of every man in the region was brought up and discussed. Among others, Ross mentioned the old man in the ditch.

"He wouldn't hurt a bumblebee!" declared the sheriff. "He's got a bunch of cattle, but he's the mildest old man in the State. He's the last rancher in the country to even stand for such work. What made you mention him?"

"I passed him as I was riding back," replied Cavanagh, "and he had a scared look in his eyes."

The sheriff grunted. "You imagined all that. The old chap always has a kind of meek look."

Cavanagh, tired, hungry, and rebellious, waited until the first faint light in the east announced the dawn; then he rose, and, stretching his hand out toward it, said: "Here comes the new day. Will it be a new day to the State, or is it to be the same old round of savagery?"

Redfield expressed a word of hope, and in that spirit the ranger mounted and rode away back toward the small teepee wherein Wetherford was doing his best to expiate his past—a past that left him old and friendless at fifty-five. The sheriff and his men took up the work of vengeance which fell to them as officers of the law.

It was nearly noon of a glorious day as Cavanagh, very tired and very hungry, rode up to the sheep-herder's tent. Wetherford was sitting in the sun calmly smoking his pipe, the sheep were feeding not far away, attended by the dog, and an air of peace covered his sunlit rocky world.

"How is the Basque?" asked the ranger.

Wetherford pointed upward. "All over."

"Then it wasn't smallpox?"

"I reckon that's what it was; it sure was fierce. I judge it's a case of Injun burial—no ceremony—right here in the rocks. I'll let you dig the hole (I'm just about all in), but mind you keep to the windward all the time. I don't want you spotted."

Cavanagh understood the necessity for these precautions, but first of all came his own need of food and rest. Turning his tired horse to grass, he stretched himself along a grassy, sunny cranny between the rocks, and there ate and afterward slept, while all about him the lambs called and the conies whined.

He was awakened by a pebble tossed upon him, and when he arose, stiff and sore, but feeling stronger and in better temper, the sun was wearing low. Setting to work at his task, he threw the loose rock out of a hollow in the ledge near by, and to this rude sepulchre Wetherford dragged the dead man, refusing all aid, and there piled a cairn of rocks above his grave.

The ranger was deeply moved by the pitiless contrast of the scene and the drama. The sun was still shining warmly aslant the heavens; the wind, crisp and sweet, wandered by on laggard wings, the conies cried from the ledges; the lambs were calling—and in the midst of it one tattered fragment of humanity was heaping the iron earth upon another, stricken, perhaps, by the same dread disease.

Wetherford himself paused to moralize. "I suppose that chap has a mother somewhere who is wondering

where her boy is. This isn't exactly Christian burial, but it's all he'll get, I reckon; for whether it was smallpox or plain fever, nobody's going to uselessly resurrect him. Even the coyotes will fight shy of his meat."

Nevertheless, the ranger took a hand at the end and rolled some huge bowlders upon the grave, to insure the wolves' defeat.

"Now burn the bedding," he commanded—"the whole camp has got to go — and your clothing, too, after we get down the hill."

"What will we do with the sheep?"

"Drive them over the divide and leave them."

All these things Wetherford did, and leaving the camp in ashes behind him, Cavanagh drove the sheep before him on his homeward way. As night fell, the dog, at his command, rounded them up and put them to bed, and the men went on down the valley, leaving the brave brute on guard, pathetic figure of faithful guardianship.

"It hurts me to desert you, old fellow," called the ranger, looking back, "but there's no help for it. I'll come up in the morning and bring you some biscuit."

The collie seemed to understand. He waggled his tail and whined, as though struggling to express his wonder and pain, and Ross, moved to pity, called: "Come on, boy, never mind the sheep! Come along with us!"

But the dog, leaping from side to side, uttered a short howl and a sharp bark, as if to say: "I can't! I can't!"

"He's onto *his* job," remarked Wetherford. "It beats all how human they do seem sometimes. I've no manner of doubt that dago's booted him all over the place

many a time, and yet he seemed horrible sorry about his master's trouble. Every few minutes, all night long, he'd come pattering and whining round the door of the tent—didn't come in, seemed just trying to ask how things were coming. He was like a child, lonesome and grieving."

It was long after dark when they entered the canon just above the cabin, and Wetherford was shivering from cold and weakness.

"Now you pull up just outside the gate, and wait there till I bring out some blankets; then you've got to strip to the skin and start the world all over again," said Cavanagh. "I'll build a fire here, and we'll cremate your past. How about it?"

"I'm willing," responded Wetherford. "You can burn everything that belongs to me but my wife and my girl."

All through the ceremony which followed ran this self-banter. "I'll be all ranger, barring a commission," he said, with a grin, as he put on the olive-yellow shirt and a pair of dusty-green trousers. "And here goes my past!" he added, as he tossed his contaminated rags upon the fire.

"What a corking opportunity to make a fresh start," commented Cavanagh. "I hope you see it."

"I see it; but it's hard to live up to your mark."

When every precaution had been taken, the ranger led the freshly scrubbed, scoured, and transformed fugitive to his cabin.

"Why, man, you're fit for the State Legislature," he

exclaimed, as they came into the full light. "My clothes don't precisely meet every demand you make upon them, but they give you an air of command. I wish your wife could see you now."

Wetherford was quite serious as he answered: "This uniform means more to me than you think. I wish I was entitled to wear it. The wild-wood is just about populous enough for me."

"Good for you!" responded Cavanagh. "To convert a man of your record to a belief in conservation is to demonstrate once again the regenerative power of an idea." Then, seeing that Wetherford was really in earnest, he added: "You can stay with me as long as you wish. Perhaps in time you might be able to work into the service as a guard, although the chief is getting more and more insistent on real foresters."

There were tears in Wetherford's eyes as he said: "You cannot realize what this clean, warm uniform means to me. For nine years I wore the prison stripes; then I was turned loose with a shoddy suit and a hat a size too big for me—an outfit that gave me away everywhere I went. Till my hair and beard sprouted I had a hard rustle of it, but my clothes grew old faster than my beard. At last I put every cent I had earned into a poor old horse, and a faded saddle, and once mounted I kept a-moving north." He smoothed the sleeve of his coat. "It is ten years since I was dressed like a man."

"You need not worry about food or shelter for the present," replied Cavanagh, gently. "Grub is not costly

here, and house-rent is less than nominal, so make yourself at home and get strong."

Wetherford lifted his head. "But I want to do something. I want to redeem myself in some way. I don't want my girl to know who I am, but I'd like to win her respect. I can't be what you say she thinks I was, but if I had a chance I might show myself a man again. I wouldn't mind Lize knowing that I am alive—it might be a comfort to her; but I don't want even her to be told till I can go to her in my own duds."

"She's pretty sick," said Cavanagh. "I telephoned Lee Virginia last night, and if you wish you may ride down with me to-morrow and see her."

The old man fell a-tremble. "I daren't do that. I can't bear to tell her where I've been!"

"She needn't know. I will tell her you've been out of your mind. I'll say anything you wish! You can go to her in the clothes you have on if you like—she will not recognize you as the prisoner I held the other night. You can have your beard trimmed, and not even the justice will know you."

All reserve had vanished out of the convict's heart, and with choking voice he thanked his young host. "I'll never be a burden to you," he declared, in firmer voice. "And if my lung holds out, I'll show you I'm not the total locoe that I 'pear to be."

No further reference was made to Lee Virginia, but Ross felt himself to be more deeply involved than ever by these promises; his fortunes seemed to be inextricably bound up with this singular and unhappy family. Lying

in his bunk (after the lights were out), he fancied himself back in his ancestral home, replying to the questions of his aunts and uncles, who were still expecting him to bring home a rich and beautiful American heiress. Some of the Cavanaghs were drunkards and some were vixens, but they were on the whole rather decent, rather decorous and very dull, and to them this broken ex-convict and this slattern old barmaid would seem very far from the ideal they had formed of the family into which Ross was certain to marry.

But as he recalled the spot in which he lay and the uniform which hung upon the wall, he was frank to admit that the beautiful and rich heiress of whom his family dreamed was a very unsubstantial vision indeed, and that, to be honest with himself, he had nothing to offer for such shining good-fortune.

At breakfast next morning he said: "I must ride back and take some bread to the dog. I can't go away and leave him there without saying 'hello.'"

"Let me do that," suggested Wetherford. "I'm afraid to go down to the Fork. I reckon I'd better go back and tend the sheep till Gregg sends some one up to take my place."

"That might be too late to see Lize. Lee's voice showed great anxiety. She may be on her death-bed. No; you'd better go down with me to-day," he urged. And at last the old man consented.

Putting some bread in his pockets, Ross rode off up the trail to see how the dog and his flock were faring. He had not gone far when he heard the tinkle of the

bells and the murmur of the lambs, and a few moments later the collie came toward him with the air of a boy who, having assumed to disregard the orders of his master, expects a scolding. He plainly said: "I've brought my sheep to you because I was lonesome. Please forgive me."

Cavanagh called to him cheerily, and tossed him a piece of bread, which he caught in his teeth but did not swallow; on the contrary, he held it while leaping for joy of the praise he heard in his new-found master's voice.

Turning the flock upward again toward the higher peaks, the ranger commanded the collie to their heels, and so, having redeemed his promise, rode back to the cabin, where he found Wetherford saddled and ready for his momentous trip to the valley. He had shaved away his gray beard, and had Ross been unprepared for these changes he would have been puzzled to account for this decidedly military figure sitting statuesquely on his pony before the door.

"You can prove an alibi," he called, as he drew near. "Gregg himself would never recognize you now."

Wetherford was in no mood for joking. "Lize will. I wore a mustache in the old days, and there's a scar on my chin."

As he rode he confided this strange thing to Cavanagh. "I know," said he, "that Lize is old and wrinkled, for I've seen her, but all the same I can't realize it. That heavy-set woman down there is not Lize. My Lize is slim and straight. This woman whom you know has

stolen her name and face, that's all. I can't explain exactly what I feel, but Lee Virginia means more to me now than Lize."

"I think I understand you," said Cavanagh, with sympathy in his voice.

The nearer Wetherford came to the actual meeting with his wife the more he shook. At last he stopped in the road. "I don't believe I can do it," he declared. "I'll be like a ghost to her. What's the use of it? She'll only be worried by my story. I reckon I'd better keep dark to everybody. Let me go back. I'm plum scared cold."

While still he argued, two men on horseback rounded a sharp turn in the trail and came face to face with the ranger. Wetherford's face went suddenly gray. "My God, there's the deputy!"

"Keep quiet. I'll do the talking," commanded Cavanagh, who was instant in his determination to shield the man. "Good-morning, gentlemen," he called, cheerily, "you're abroad early!"

The man in front was the deputy sheriff of the county; his companion was a stranger.

"That was a horrible mess you stumbled on over on Deer Creek," the deputy remarked.

"It certainly was. Have any arrests been made?"

"Not yet, but we're on a clew. This is Marshal Haines, of Dallas, Mr. Cavanagh," pursued the deputy. The two men nodded in token of the introduction, and the deputy went on: "You remember that old cuss that used to work for Gregg?"

Again Cavanagh nodded.

"Well, that chap is wanted by the Texas authorities. Mr. Haines, here, wants to see him mighty bad. He's an escaped convict with a bad record."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Cavanagh. "I thought he seemed a bit gun-shy."

"The last seen of him was when Sam Gregg sent him up to herd sheep. I think he was mixed up in that killing, myself—him and Ballard—and we're going up to get some track of him. Didn't turn up at your station, did he?"

"Yes, he came by some days ago, on his way, so he said, to relieve that sick Basque, Ambro. I went up a couple of days ago, and found the Basque dead and the old man gone. I buried the herder the best I could, and I'm on my way down to report the case."

The deputy mused: "He may be hanging 'round some of the lumber-camps. I reckon we had better go up and look the ground over, anyhow. We might just chance to overhaul him."

"He may have pulled out over the range," suggested the ranger. "Anyhow, it's a long way up there, and you'll probably have to camp at my place to-night. You'll find the key hanging up over the door. Go in and make yourself comfortable."

The deputy thanked him, and was about to ride on when Cavanagh added: "I burned that Basque's tent and bedding for fear of contagion. His outfit was worthless, anyhow. You'll find the sheep just above my cabin, and the horse in my corral."

"The old man didn't take the horse, eh? Well, that settles it; he's sure at one of the camps. Much obliged. Good-day."

As the two officers rode away Wetherford leaned heavily on his pommel and stared at the ranger with wide eyes. His face was drawn and his lips dry. "They'll get me! My God, they'll get me!" he said.

"Oh no, they won't," rejoined Cavanagh. "You're all right yet. They suspected nothing. How could they, with you in uniform and in my company?"

"All the same, I'm scared. That man Haines had his eyes on me every minute. He saw right through me. They'll get me, and they'll charge me up with that killing."

"No, they won't, I tell you," insisted the ranger. "Haines suspected nothing. I had his eye. He never saw you before, and has nothing but a description to go by. So cheer up. Your uniform and your position with me will make you safe—perfectly safe. They'll find the Basque's camp burned and the sheep in charge of the dog, and they'll fancy that you have skipped across the range. But see here, old man," and he turned on him sharply, "you didn't tell me the whole truth. You said you were out on parole."

"I couldn't tell you the whole truth," replied the fugitive. "But I will now. I was in for a life sentence. I was desperate for the open air and homesick for the mountains, and I struck down one of the guards. I was willing to do anything to get out. I thought if I could get back to this country and my wife and child I'd be

safe. I said I'd be willing to go back to the pen if necessary, but I'm not. I can't do it. I'd die there in that hell. You must save me for my girl's sake."

His voice and eyes were wild with a kind of desperate fury of fear, and Cavanagh, moved to pity, assured him of his aid. "Now listen," he said. "I'm going to shield you on account of your work for that poor shepherd and for your daughter's sake. It's my duty to apprehend you, of course, but I'm going to protect you. The safest thing for you to do is to go back to my cabin. Ride slow, so as not to get there till they're gone. They'll ride over to the sawmill, without doubt. If they come back this way, remember that the deputy saw you only as a ragged old man with a long beard, and that Haines has nothing but a printed description to go by. There's no use trying to flee. You are a marked man in that uniform, and you are safer right here with me than anywhere else this side of Chicago. Haines is likely to cross the divide in the belief that you have gone that way, and, if he does, you have no one but the deputy to deal with."

He succeeded at last in completely rousing the older man's courage.

Wetherford rose to meet his opportunity. "I'll do it," he said, firmly.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Cavanagh, to encourage him. "You can throw them off the track this time, and when I come back to-morrow I'll bring some other clothing for you, and then we'll plan some kind of a scheme that will get you out of the country. I'll not let them make a scapegoat of you."

The ranger watched the fugitive, as he started back over the trail in this desperate defiance of his pursuers, with far less confidence in the outcome than he had put into words.

"All depends on Wetherford himself. If his nerve does not fail him, if they take the uniform for granted, and do not carry the matter to the Supervisor, we will pull the plan through." And in this hope he rode away down the trail with bent head, for all this bore heavily upon his relationship to the girl waiting for him in the valley. He had thought Lize a burden, a social disability, but a convict father now made the mother's faults of small account.

The nearer he drew to the meeting with Lee Virginia the more important that meeting became. After all, woman is more important than war. The love of home and the child persists through incredible vicissitudes; the conqueror returns from foreign lands the lover still; and in the deep of flooded mines and on the icy slopes of arctic promontories dead men have been found holding in their rigid hands the pictured face of some fair girl. In the presence of such irrefutable testimony, who shall deny the persistence and the reality of love?

Cavanagh had seen Virginia hardly more than a score of times, and yet she filled his thought, confused his plans, making of his brain a place of doubt and hesitation. For her sake he had entered upon a plan to shield a criminal, to harbor an escaped convict, It was of no avail to argue that he was moved to shield Wetherford because of his heroic action on the peak. He knew perfectly well that

it was because he could not see that fair, brave girl further disgraced by the discovery of her father's identity, for in the searching inquiry which would surely follow his secret would develop.

To marry her, knowing the character of her father and her mother, was madness, and the voice within him warned him of his folly. "Pure water cannot be drawn from corrupt sources," it is said. Nevertheless, the thought of having the girl with him in the wilderness filled him with divine recklessness. He was bewitched by the satin smoothness of her skin, the liquid light of her eye, the curve of her cheek, the swell of her bosom, and, most of all, by the involuntary movement of yielding which betrayed her trust and her love. While still he debated, alternately flushed with resolve to be happy and chilled by some strange dejection, he met Swenson, the young guard who guarded the forest on the south Fork.

As he rode up, Cavanagh perceived in the other man's face something profoundly serious. He did not smile in greeting, as was usual with him, and, taking some letters from his pocket, passed them over in ominous silence.

Cavanagh, upon looking them over, selected a letter evidently from Mrs. Redfield, and stuffed the others into his coat-pocket. It was a closely written letter, and contained in its first sentence something which deeply affected him. Slipping from his saddle, he took a seat upon a stone, that he might the better read and slowly digest what was contained therein. He read on slowly, without any other movement than that which was required to turn the leaves. It was a passionate plea from

Eleanor Redfield against his further entanglement with Lize Wetherford's girl.

"You cannot afford to marry her. You simply cannot. The old mother is too dreadful, and may live on for years. The girl is attractive, I grant you, but she's tainted. If there is anything in the law of heredity, she will develop the traits of her mother or her father sooner or later. You must not marry her, Ross; and if you cannot, what will you do? There's only one thing to do. Keep away. I enclose a letter from your sister, pleading with me to urge you to visit them this winter. She is not very strong, as you can see by her writing, and her request will give you an excuse for breaking off all connection with this girl. I am sorry for her, Ross, but you can't marry her. You must not — you must not! Ride over and see us soon, and we will talk it all out together."

He opened another letter, but did not read it. He was too profoundly shaken by the first. He felt the pure friendship, the fine faith, and the guardianship of the writer, and he acknowledged the good sense of all she said, and yet—and yet—

When he looked up Swenson was staring down at him with a face of such bitterness that it broke through even the absorbed and selfish meditation into which he had been thrown.

"What's the matter, Swenson? You look as if you had lost a friend."

"I have," answered the guard, shortly, "and so have you. The chief is out."

"What?"

"They've got him!" he exclaimed. "He's out."

Cavanagh sprang up. "I don't believe it! For what reason? Why?"

"Don't that letter tell you? The whole town is chuckling. Every criminal and plug-ugly in the country is spitting in our faces this morning. Yes, sir, the President has fired the chief — the man that built up this Forestry Service. The whole works is goin' to hell, that's what it is. We'll have all the coal thieves, water-power thieves, poachers, and free-grass pirates piling in on us in mobs. They'll eat up the forest. I see the finish of the whole business. They'll put some Western man in, somebody they can work. Then where will we be?"

Cavanagh's young heart burned with indignation, but he tried to check the other man's torrent of protest.

"I can't believe it. There's some mistake. Maybe they've made him the secretary of the department or something."

"No, they haven't. They've thrown him out. They've downed him because he tried to head off some thievery of coal-mines in Alaska." The man was ready to weep with chagrin and indignant sorrow. His voice choked, and he turned away to conceal his emotion.

Cavanagh put the letter back into his pocket and mounted his horse. "Well, go on back to your work, Swenson. I'm going to town to get the Supervisor on the wire, and find out what it all means."

He was almost as badly stunned by the significance of Swenson's news as Swenson himself. Could it be possible

that the man who had built up the field service of the bureau—the man whose clean-handed patriotism had held the boys together, making them every year more clearly a unit, a little army of enthusiasts—could it be possible that the originator, the organizer of this great plan, had been stricken down just when his influence was of most account? He refused to believe it of an administration pledged to the cause of conservation.

As he entered the town he was struck instantly by the change in the faces turned toward him, in the jocular greetings hurled at him. "Hello, Mr. Cossack! What do you think of your chief now?"

"This will put an end to your infernal nonsense," said another. "We'll have a man in there now who knows the Western ways, and who's willing to boom things along. The cork is out of your forest bottle."

Gregg was most offensive of all. "This means throwing open the forest to anybody that wants to use it. Means an entire reversal of this fool policy."

"Wait and see," replied Cavanagh, but his face was rigid with the repression of the fear and anger he felt. With hands that trembled he opened the door to the telephone-booth, closed it carefully behind him, and called for the Supervisor's office. As soon as Redfield replied, he burst forth in question: "Is it true that the chief is out?"

Redfield's voice was husky as he replied, "Yes, lad, they've got him."

"Good Lord! What a blow to the service!" exclaimed Cavanagh, with a groan of sorrow and rage. What

is the President thinking of—to throw out the only man who stood for the future, the man who had built up this corps, who was its inspiration?" Then after a pause he added, with bitter resolution: "This ends it for me. Here's where I get off."

"Don't say that, boy. We need you now more than ever."

"I'm through. I'm done with America—with the States. I shall write my resignation at once. Send down another man to take my place."

Redfield's pleadings were of no avail. Cavanagh went directly from the booth to the post-office, and there, surrounded by jeering and exultant citizens, he penned his resignation and mailed it. Then, with stern and contemptuous face, he left the place, making no reply to the jeers of his enemies, and, mounting his horse, mechanically rode away out upon the plains, seeking the quiet, open places in order to regain calmness and decision. He did not deliberately ride away from Lee Virginia, but as he entered upon the open country he knew that he was leaving her as he was leaving the forests. He had cut himself off from her as he had cut himself off from the work he loved. His heart was swollen big within his breast. He longed for the return of "the Colonel" to the White House. "What manner of ruler is this who is ready to strike down the man whose very name means conservation, and who in a few years would have made this body of forest rangers the most effective corps of its size in the world?" He groaned again, and his throat ached with the fury of his indignation.

"Dismissed for insubordination," the report said. "In what way? Only in making war on greed, in checking graft, in preserving the heritage of the people."

The lash that cut deepest was the open exultation of the very men whose persistent attempt to appropriate public property the chief had helped to thwart. "Redfield will go next. The influence that got the chief will get Hugh. He's too good a man to escape. Then, as Swenson says, the thieves will roll in upon us to slash, and burn, and corrupt. What a country! What a country!"

As he reached the end of this line of despairing thought, he came back to the question of his remaining personal obligations. Wetherford must be cared for, and then—and then! there was Virginia waiting for him at this moment. In his weakness he confessed that he had never intended to marry her, and yet he had never deliberately intended to do her wrong. He had always stopped short of the hideous treachery involved in despoiling her young love. "And for her sake, to save her from humiliation, I will help her father to freedom."

This brought him back to the hideous tragedy of the heights, and with that thought the last shred of faith in the sense of justice in the State vanished.

"They will never discover those murderers. They will permit this outrage to pass unpunished, like the others. It will be merely another 'dramatic incident' in the history of the range."

His pony of its own accord turned, and by a circuitous route headed at last for the home canon as if it knew

its master's wavering mind. Cavanagh observed what he was doing, but his lax hand did not intervene. Helpless to make the decision himself, he welcomed the intervention of the homing instinct of his horse. With bent head and brooding face he returned to the silence of the trail and the loneliness of the hills.

XII

CAVANAGH'S LAST VIGIL BEGINS

On his solitary ride upward and homeward the ranger searched his heart and found it bitter and disloyal. Love had interfered with duty, and pride had checked and defeated love. His path, no longer clear and definite, looped away aimlessly, lost in vague, obscure meanderings. His world had suddenly grown gray.

The magnificent plan of the Chief Forester (to which he had pledged such buoyant allegiance) was now a thing apart, a campaign in which he was to be merely an onlooker. It had once offered something congenial, helpful, inspiring; now it seemed fantastic and futile without the man who shaped it. "I am nearing forty," he said; "Eleanor is right. I am wasting my time here in these hills; but what else can I do?"

He had no trade, no business, no special skill, save in the ways of the mountaineer, and to return to his ancestral home at the moment seemed a woful confession of failure.

But the cause of his deepest dismay and doubt was the revelation to himself of the essential lawlessness of his love, a force within him which now made his duties as a law-enforcer sadly ironic. After all, was not the

man who presumed upon a maiden's passion and weakness a greater malefactor than he who steals a pearl or strangles a man for his gold? To betray a soul, to poison a young life, is this not the unforgivable crime?

"Here am I, a son of the law, complaining of the lawlessness of the West—fighting it, conquering it—and yet at the same time I permit myself to descend to the level of Neill Ballard, to think as the barbaric man thinks."

He burned hot with contempt of himself, and his teeth set hard in the resolution to put himself beyond the reach of temptation. "Furthermore, I am concealing a criminal, cloaking a convict, when I should be arresting him," he pursued, referring back to Wetherford. "And why? Because of a girl's romantic notion of her father, a notion which can be preserved only by keeping his secret, by aiding him to escape." And even this motive, he was obliged to confess, had not all been on the highest plane. It was all a part of his almost involuntary campaign to win Virginia's love. The impulse had been lawless, lawless as the old-time West, and the admission cut deep into his self-respect.

It was again dusk as he rode up to his own hitching-pole and slipped from the saddle.

Wetherford came out, indicating by his manner that he had recovered his confidence once more. "How did you find things in the valley?" he inquired, as they walked away toward the corral.

"Bad," responded the ranger.

"In what way?"

"The chief has been dismissed and all the rascals are chuckling with glee. I've resigned from the service."

Wetherford was aghast. "What for?"

"I will not serve under any other chief. The best thing for you to do is to go out when I do. I think by keeping on that uniform you can get to the train with me."

"Did you see Lize and my girl?"

"No, I only remained in town a minute. It was too hot for me. I'm done with it. Wetherford, I'm going back to civilization. No more wild West for me." The bitterness of his voice touched the older man's heart, but he considered it merely a mood.

"Don't lose your nerve; mebbe this ends the reign of terror."

"Nothing will end the moral shiftlessness of this country but the death of the freebooter. You can't put new wine into old bottles. These cattle-men, deep in their hearts, sympathize with the wiping-out of those sheep-herders. The cry for justice comes from the man whose ear is not being chewed—the man far off—and from the town-builder who knows the State is being hurt by such atrocities; but the ranchers over on Deer Creek will conceal the assassins—you know that. You've had experience with these free-grass warriors; you know what they are capable of. That job was done by men who hated the dagoes—hated 'em because they were rival claimants for the range. It's nonsense to attempt to fasten it on men like Neill Ballard. The men who did that piece of work are well-known stock-owners."

"I reckon that's so."

"Well, now, who's going to convict them? I can't do it. I'm going to pull out as soon as I can put my books in shape, and you'd better go too."

They were standing at the gate of the corral, and the roar of the mountain stream enveloped them in a cloud of sound.

Wetherford spoke slowly: "I hate to lose my girl, now that I've seen her, but I guess you're right; and Lize, poor old critter! It's hell's shame the way I've queered her life, and I'd give my right arm to be where I was twelve years ago; but with a price on my head and old age comin' on, I don't see myself ever again getting up to par. It's a losing game for me now."

There was resignation as well as despair in his voice and Cavanagh felt it, but he said, "There's one other question that may come up for decision—if that Basque died of smallpox, you may possibly take it."

"I've figured on that, but it will take a day or two to show on me. I don't feel any ache in my bones yet. If I do come down, you keep away from me. You've got to live and take care of Virginia."

"She should never have returned to this accursed country," Cavanagh harshly replied, starting back toward the cabin.

The constable, smoking his pipe beside the fireplace, did not present an anxious face; on the contrary, he seemed plumply content as he replied to the ranger's greeting. He represented very well the type of officer which these disorderly communities produce. Brave

and tireless when working along the line of his prejudices, he could be most laxly inefficient when his duties cut across his own or his neighbor's interests. Being a cattle-man by training, he was glad of the red herring which the Texas officer had trailed across the line of his pursuit.

This attitude still further inflamed Cavanagh's indignant hate of the country. The theory which the deputy developed was transparent folly. "It was just a case of plain robbery," he argued. "One of them dagoes had money, and Neill Ballard and that man Edwards just naturally follered him and killed the whole bunch and scooted—that's my guess."

Cavanagh's outburst was prevented by the scratching and whining of a dog at his door. For a moment he wondered at this; his perturbed mind had dropped the memory of the loyal collie.

As he opened the door, the brute, more than half human in his gaze, looked beseechingly at his new master, as if to say, "I couldn't help it—I was so lonely. And I love you."

"You poor beastie," the ranger called, pityingly, and the dog leaped up in a frenzy of joyous relief, putting his paws on his breast, then dropped to the ground, and, crouching low on his front paws, quivered and yawned with ecstasy of worship. It seemed that he could not express his passionate adoration, his relief, except by these grotesque contortions.

"Come in, Laddie!" Ross urged, but this the dog refused to do. "I am a creature of the open air," he

seemed to say. "My duties are of the outer world. I have no wish for a fireside—all I need is a master's praise and a bit of bread."

Cavanagh brought some food, and, putting it down outside the door, spoke to him, gently: "Good boy! Eat that and go back to your flock. I'll come to see you in the morning."

When Cavanagh, a few minutes later, went to the door the dog was gone, and, listening, the ranger could hear the faint, diminishing bleating of the sheep on the hill-side above the corral. The four-footed warden was with his flock.

An hour later the sound of a horse's hoofs on the bridge gave warning of a visitor, and as Cavanagh went to the door Gregg rode up, seeking particulars as to the death of the herder and the whereabouts of the sheep.

The ranger was not in a mood to invite the sheepman in, and, besides, he perceived the danger to which Wetherford was exposed. Therefore his answers were short. Gregg, on his part, did not appear anxious to enter.

"What happened to that old hobo I sent up?" he asked.

Cavanagh briefly retold his story, and at the end of it Gregg grunted. "You say you burned the tent and all the bedding?"

"Every thread of it. It wasn't safe to leave it."

"What ailed the man?"

"I don't know, but it looked and smelled like smallpox."

The deputy rose with a spring. "Smallpox! You didn't *handle* the cuss?"

Cavanagh did not spare him. "Somebody had to lend a hand. I couldn't see him die there alone, and he had to be buried, so I did the job."

Gregg recoiled a step or two, but the deputy stood staring, the implication of all this sinking deep. "Were you wearing the same clothes you've got on?"

"Yes, but I used a slicker while working around the body."

"Good King!" The sweat broke out on the man's face. "You ought to be arrested."

Ross took a step toward him. "I'm at your service."

"Keep off!" shouted the sheriff.

Ross smiled, then became very serious. "I took every precaution, Mr. Deputy; I destroyed everything that could possibly carry the disease. I burned every utensil, including the saddle, everything but the man's horse and his dog!"

"The dog!" exclaimed the deputy, seized with another idea. "Not that dog you fed just now?"

"The very same," replied Cavanagh.

"Don't you know a dog's sure to carry the poison in his hair? Why, *he jumped on you!* Why didn't you shoot him?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Because he's a faithful guardian, and, besides, he was with the sheep, and never so much as entered the tent."

"Do you *know* that?"

"Not absolutely, but he seemed to be on shy terms with the herder, and I'm sure—"

The officer caught up his hat and coat and started for the door. "It's me for the open air," said he.

As the men withdrew Ross followed them, and, standing in his door, delivered his final volley. "If this State does not punish those fiends, every decent man should emigrate out of it, turning the land over to the wolves, the wildcats, and other beasts of prey."

Gregg, as he retreated, called back: "That's all right, Mr. Ranger, but you'd better keep to the hills for a few weeks. The settlers down below won't enjoy having a man with smallpox chassayin' around town. They might rope and tie you."

Wetherford came out of his hiding-place with a grave face. "I wonder I didn't think of that collie. They say a cat's fur will carry disease germs like a sponge. Must be the same with a dog."

"Well, it's too late now," replied Cavanagh. "But they're right about our staying clear of town. They'll quarantine us sure. All the same, I don't believe the dog carried any germs of the disease."

Wetherford, now that the danger of arrest was over, was disposed to be grimly humorous. "There's no great loss without some small gain. I don't think we'll be troubled by any more visitors—not even by sheriffs or doctors. I reckon you and I are in for a couple of months of the quiet life—the kind we read about."

Cavanagh, now that he was definitely out of the Forest Service, perceived the weight of every objection which his friends and relatives had made against his going

into it. It was a lonely life, and must ever be so. It was all very well for a young unmarried man, who loved the woods and hills beyond all things else, and who could wait for advancement, but it was a sad place for one who desired a wife. The ranger's place was on the trail and in the hills, and to bring a woman into these high silences, into these lone reaches of forest and fell, would be cruel. To bring children into them would be criminal.

All the next day, while Wetherford pottered about the cabin or the yard, Cavanagh toiled at his papers, resolved to leave everything in the perfect order which he loved. Whenever he looked round upon his belongings, each and all so redolent of the wilderness—he found them very dear. His chairs (which he had rived out of slabs), his guns, his robes, his saddles and their accoutrements—all meant much to him. "Some of them must go with me," he said. "And when I am settled down in the old home I'll have one room to myself which shall be so completely of the mountain America that when I am within it I can fancy myself back in the camp."

He thought of South Africa as a possibility, and put it aside, knowing well that no other place could have the same indefinable charm that the Rocky Mountains possessed, for the reason that he had come to them at his most impressionable age. Then, too, the United States, for all their faults, seemed merely an extension of the English form of government.

Wetherford was also moving in deep thought, and at last put his perplexity into a question. "What am I to do? I'm beginning to feel queer. I reckon the chances

for my having smallpox are purty fair. Maybe I'd better drop down to Sulphur and report to the authorities. I've got a day or two before the blossoms will begin to show on me."

Cavanagh studied him closely. "Now don't get to thinking you've got it. I don't see how you could attach a germ. The high altitude and the winds up there ought to prevent infection. I'm not afraid for myself, but if you're able, perhaps we'd better pull out to-morrow."

Later in the day Wetherford expressed deeper dejection. "I don't see anything ahead of me anyhow," he confessed. "If I go back to the 'pen' I'll die of lung trouble, and I don't know how I'm going to earn a living in the city. Mebbe the best thing I could do would be to take the pox and go under. I'm afraid of big towns," he continued. "I always was—even when I had money. Now that I am old and broke I daren't go. No city for me."

Cavanagh's patience gave way. "But, man, you can't stay here! I'm packing up to leave. Your only chance of getting out of the country is to go when I go, and in my company." His voice was harsh and keen, and the old man felt its edge; but he made no reply, and this sad silence moved Cavanagh to repentance. His irritability warned him of something deeply changing in his own nature.

Approaching the brooding felon, he spoke gently and sadly. "I'm sorry for you, Wetherford, I sure am, but it's up to you to get clear away so that Lee will never by any possible chance find out that you are alive. She

has a romantic notion of you as a representative of the old-time West, and it would be a dreadful shock to her if she knew you as you are. It's hard to leave her, I know, now that you've seen her, but that's the manly thing to do—the only thing to do."

"Oh, you're right—of course you're right. But I wish I could be of some use to her. I wish I could chore round for the rest of my life, where I could kind o' keep watch over her. I'd be glad enough to play the scullion in her kitchen. But if you're going to take her—"

"But I'm not," protested Ross. "I'm going to leave her right here. I can't take her."

Wetherford looked at him with steady eyes, into which a keen light leaped. "Don't you intend to marry her?"

Ross turned away. "No, I don't—I mean it is impossible!"

"Why not? Don't tell me you're already married?" He said this with menacing tone.

"No, I'm not married, but—" He stopped without making his meaning plain. "I'm going to leave the country and—"

Wetherford caught him up. "I reckon I understand what you mean. You consider Lize and me undersirable parents—not just the kind you'd cut out of the herd of your own free will. Well, that's all right, I don't blame you so far as I'm concerned. But you can forget me, consider me a dead one. I'll never bother her nor you."

Cavanagh threw out an impatient hand. "It is impossible," he protested. "It's better for her and better

for me that I should do so. I've made up my mind. I'm going back to my own people."

Wetherford was thoroughly roused now. Some part of his old-time fire seemed to return to him. He rose from his chair and approached the ranger firmly. "I've seen you act like a man, Ross Cavanagh. You've been a good partner these last few days—a son couldn't have treated me better—and I hate like hell to think ill of you; but my girl loves you—I could see that. I could see her lean to you, and I've got to know something else right now. You're going to leave here—you're going to throw her off. What I want to know is this: Do you leave her as good as you found her? Come, now, I want an answer, as one man to another."

Cavanagh's eyes met his with firm but sorrowful gaze. "In the sense in which you mean, I leave her as I found her."

The old man's open hand shot out toward his rescuer. "Forgive me, my lad," he said, humbly; "for a minute I—doubted you."

Ross took his hand, but slowly replied: "It will be hard for you to understand, when I tell you that I care a great deal for your daughter, but a man like me—an Englishman—cannot marry—or he ought not to marry—to himself alone. There are so many others to consider—his friends, his sisters—"

Wetherford dropped his hand. "I see!" His tone was despairing. "When I was young we married the girls we loved in defiance of man, God, or the cupboard; but you are not that kind. You may be right. I'm

nothing but a debilitated old cow-puncher branded by the State—a man who threw away his chance—but I can tell you straight, I've learned that nothing but the love of a woman counts. Furthermore," and here his fire flashed again, "I'd have killed you had you taken advantage of my girl!"

"Which would have been your duty," declared Cavanagh, wearily.

And in the face of this baffling mood, which he felt but could not understand, the old man fell silent.

XIII

CAVANAGH ASKS FOR HELP

Lee Virginia waited with increasing impatience for Ross Cavanagh's return, expecting each noon to see him appear at the door; but when three days passed without word or sign from him, her uneasiness deepened into alarm. The whole town was profoundly excited over the murder, that she knew, and she began to fear that some of the ranger's enemies had worked their evil will upon him.

With this vague fear in her heart, she went forth into the street to inquire. One of the first men she met was Sifton, who was sitting, as usual, outside the livery-barn door, smiling, inefficient, content. Of him she asked: "Have you seen Mr. Cavanagh?"

"Yes," he answered, "I saw him yesterday, just after dinner, down at the post-office. He was writing a letter at the desk. Almost immediately afterward he mounted and rode away. He was much cut up over his chief's dismissal."

"Why has he not written to me," she asked herself, "and why should he have gone away without a word of greeting, explanation, or good-bye? It would have taken but a moment's time to call at the door."

The more she dwelt upon this neglect the more significant it became. After the tender look in his eyes, after the ardent clasp of his hand, the thought that he could be so indifferent was at once a source of pain and self-reproach.

With childish frankness she went to Lize and told her what she had learned, her eyes dim with hot tears. "Ross came to town, and went away back to his cabin without coming to see me."

"Are you sure he's been here?"

"Yes. Mr. Sifton saw him go. He came in, got some letters at the post-office, and then rode away—" Her voice broke as her disappointment and grief overcame her.

Lize struggled to a sitting position. "There's some mistake about this. Ross Cavanagh never was the whifflin' kind of man. You've got to remember he's on duty. Probably the letter was some order that carried him right back to his work."

"But if he had really cared, he could have ridden by to say just a word; but he didn't, he went away without a sign, after promising to come." She buried her face in the coverlet of her mother's bed, and wept in childish grief and despair.

Lize was forced to acknowledge that the ranger's action was inexplicable, but she did her best to make light of it. "He may have hurried to town on some errand, and hadn't a moment to spare. These are exciting days for him, remember. He'll be in to-morrow sure."

With a faint hope of this, the girl rose and went about her daily tasks; but the day passed, and another, without word or sign of the recreant lover, and each day brought a deeper sense of loss, but her pride would not permit her to show her grief.

Young Gregg, without knowing in the least the cause of her troubled face, took this occasion to offer comfort. His manner toward her had changed since she no longer had a part in the management of the eating-house, and for that reason she did not repulse him as sharply as she had been wont to do. He really bore Cavanagh no ill-will, and was, indeed, shrewd enough to understand that Lee admired the ranger, and that his own courtship was rather hopeless; nevertheless, he persisted, his respect for her growing as he found her steadfast in her refusal to permit any familiarity.

"See here, Miss Virginia," he cried, as she was passing him in the hall, "I can see you're worried about Lize (I mean your mother), and if I can be of any use I hope you'll call on me." As she thanked him without enthusiasm, he added: "How is she to-night?"

"I think she's better."

"Can I see her?"

His tone was so earnest that the girl was moved to say: "I'll ask her."

"I wish you would; I want to say something to her."

Lize's voice reached where they stood. "Come in, Joe, the door's open."

He accepted her invitation rather awkwardly, but his face was impassive as he looked down upon her.

"Well, how about it?" she asked. "What's doing in the town?"

"Not much of anything—except talk. The whole country is buzzing over this dismissal of the Chief Forester.

"They'd better be doing something about that murder."

"They are; they're going up there in streams to see where the work was done. The coroner's inquest was held yesterday." He grinned. "'Parties came to their death by persons unknown.'"

Lize scowled. "It's a wonder they don't charge it up to Ross Cavanagh or some other ranger."

"That would be a little too raw, even for this country. They're all feeling gay over this change in the forestry head; but see here, don't you want to get out for a ride? I've got my new machine out here; it rides like silk."

"I reckon a hearse is about my kind," she replied, darkly. "If you could take me up to Cavanagh's cabin, I'd go," she added. "I want to see him."

"I can take you part way," he instantly declared. "But you'd have to ride a horse the last ten miles."

"Couldn't do it, Joe," she sighed. "These last few days I've been about as boneless as an eel. Funny the way a fellow keeps going when he's got something to do that has to be done. I'll tell you what, if you want to take me and Lee up to Sulphur, I'll go ye."

"Sure thing. What day?"

"Not for a day or two. I'm not quite up to it just now; but by Saturday I'll be saddle-wise again."

Joe turned joyously to Lee. "That will be great! Won't you come out for a spin this minute?"

For a moment Lee was tempted. Anything to get away from this horrible little den and the people who infested it was her feeling, but she distrusted Gregg, and she knew that every eye in the town would be upon her if she went, and, besides, Ross might return while she was away. "No, not to-day," she replied, finally; but her voice was gentler than it had ever been to him.

The young fellow was moved to explain his position to Lize. "You don't think much of me, and I don't blame you. I haven't been much use so far, but I'm going to reform. If I had a girl like Lee Virginia to live up to, I'd make a great citizen. I don't lay my arrest up against Cavanagh. I'm ready to pass that by. And as for this other business—this free-range war in which the old man is mixed up—I want you to know that I'm against it. Dad knows his day is short; that's what makes him so hot. But he's a bluff—just a fussy old bluff. He knows he has no more right to the Government grass than anybody else, but he's going to get ahead of the cattle-men if he can."

"Does he know who burned them sheep-herders?"

"Of course he knows, but ain't going to say so. You see, that old Basque who was killed was a monopolist, too. He went after that grass without asking anybody's leave; moreover, he belonged to that Mexican-Dago outfit that everybody hates. The old man isn't crying over that job; it's money in his pocket. All the same it's too good a chance to put the hooks into the cattle-men,

hence his offering a reward, and it looks as if something would really be done this time. They say Neill Ballard was mixed up in it, and that old guy that showed me the sheep, but I don't take much stock in that. Whoever did it was paid by the cattle-men, sure thing." The young fellow's tone and bearing made a favorable impression upon Lize. She had never seen this side of him, for the reason that he had hitherto treated her as a bartender. She was acute enough to understand that her social status had changed along with her release from the cash-register, and she was slightly more reconciled, although she could not see her way to providing a living for herself and Lee. For all these reasons she was unwontedly civil to Joe, and sent him away highly elated with the success of his interview.

"I'm going to let him take us up to Sulphur," she said to Lee. "I want to go to town."

Lee was silent, but a keen pang ran through her heart, for she perceived in this remark by her mother a tacit acknowledgment of Ross Cavanagh's desertion of them both. His invitation to them to come and camp with him was only a polite momentary impulse. "I'm ready to go," she announced, at last. "I'm tired of this place. Let us go to-morrow."

On the following morning, while they were busy packing for this journey, Redfield rolled up to the door in company with a young man in the uniform of a forester.

"Go ask Reddy to come in," commanded Lize. "I want to see him."

Redfield met the girl at the door and presented his com-

panion as "Mr. Dalton, District Forester." Dalton was a tall young fellow with a marked Southern accent. "Is Cavanagh, the ranger, in town?" he asked.

"No," Lee replied, with effort; "he was here a few days ago, but he's gone back to the forest."

Redfield studied the girl with keen gaze, perceiving a passionate restraint in her face.

"How is your mother?" he asked, politely.

Lee smiled faintly. "She's able to sit up. Won't you come in and see her?"

"With pleasure," assented Redfield, "but I want to see you alone. I have something to say to you." He turned to his superior. "Just go into the café, Dalton. I'll see you in a moment."

Lee Virginia, hitherto ashamed of the house, the furniture, the bed—everything—led the way without a word of apology. It was all detached now, something about to be left behind, like a bad garment borrowed in a time of stress. Nothing mattered since Ross did not return.

Lize, looking unwontedly refined and gentle, was sitting in a big rocking-chair with her feet on a stool, her eyes fixed on the mountains, which showed through the open window. All the morning a sense of profound change, of something passing, had oppressed her. Now that she was about to leave the valley, its charm appealed to her. She was tearing up a multitude of tiny roots of whose existence she had hitherto remained unaware. "I belong here," she acknowledged, silently. "I'd be homesick anywhere else on God's earth. It's rough and

fly-bit, and all that, but so am I. I wouldn't fit in anywhere that Lee belonged."

She acknowledged an especial liking for Redfield, and she had penetration enough, worldly wisdom enough, to know that Lee belonged more to his world than to her own, and that his guidance and friendship were worth more, much more, than that of all the rest of the country, her own included. Therefore, she said: "I'm mighty glad to see you, Reddy. Sit down. You've got to hear my little spiel this time."

Redfield, perched on the edge of a tawdry chair, looked about (like the charity visitor in a slum kitchen) without intending to express disgust; but it was a dismal room in which to be sick, and he pitied the woman the more profoundly as he remembered her in the days when "all out-doors" was none too wide for her.

Lize began, abruptly: "I'm down, but not out; in fact, I was coming up to see you this afternoon. Lee and I are just about pulling out for good."

"Indeed! Why not go back with me?"

"You can take the girl back if you want to, but now that I'm getting my chance at you I may not go."

Redfield's tone was entirely cordial as he turned to Lee. "I came hoping to carry you away. Will you come?"

"I'm afraid I can't unless mother goes," she replied, sadly.

Lize waved an imperative hand. "Fade away, child. I want to talk with Mr. Redfield alone. Go, see!"

Thus dismissed, Lee went back to the restaurant, where

she found the Forester just sitting down to his luncheon. "Mr. Redfield will be out in a few minutes," she explained.

"Won't you join me?" he asked, in the frank accent of one to whom women are comrades. "The Supervisor has been telling me about you."

She took a seat facing him, feeling something refined in his long, smoothly shaven, boyish face. He seemed very young to be District Forester, and his eyes were a soft brown with small wrinkles of laughter playing round their corners.

He began at once on the subject of his visit. "Redfield tells me you are a friend of Mr. Cavanagh's; did you know that he had resigned?"

She faced him with startled eyes. "No, indeed. Has he done so?"

"Yes, the Supervisor got a letter yesterday enclosing his resignation, and asking to be relieved at once. And when I heard of it I asked the Supervisor to bring me down to see him; he's too good a man to lose."

"Why did he resign?"

"He seemed very bitter over the chief's dismissal; but I hope to persuade him to stay in the service; he's too valuable a man to lose just now when the war is so hot. I realize that his salary is too small; but there are other places for him. Perhaps when he knows that I have a special note to him from the chief he will reconsider. He's quite capable of the Supervisor's position, and Mr. Redfield is willing to resign in his favor. I'm telling you all this because Mr. Redfield has told

me of your interest in Mr. Cavanagh—or rather his interest in you."

Sam Gregg, entering the door at this moment, came directly to the Forester's table. He was followed by the sheriff, a bearded old man with a soiled collar and a dim eye.

Gregg growled out, "You'd better keep your man Cavanagh in the hills, Mr. Forester, or somebody will take a pot-shot at him."

"Why, what's new?"

"His assistant is down with smallpox."

"*Smallpox!*" exclaimed Dalton.

Every jaw was fixed and every eye turned upon the speaker.

"Smallpox!" gasped Lee.

Gregg resumed, enjoying the sensation he was creating. "Yes, that Basque herder of mine—the one up near Black Tooth—sent word he was sick, so I hunted up an old tramp by the name of Edwards to take his place. Edwards found the dago dying of pox, and skipped out over the range, leaving him to die alone. Cavanagh went up and found the dago dead, and took care of him—result is, he's full of germs, and has brought his apprentice down with it, and both of 'em must be quarantined right where they are."

"Good heavens, man!" exclaimed Dalton. "This is serious business. Are you sure it's smallpox?"

"One of my men came from there last night. I was there myself on Monday, so was the deputy. The sheriff missed Tom this morning, but I reached him by

'phone, and Cavanagh admitted to us that the Basque died of smallpox, and that he buried him with his own hands."

The sheriff spoke up. "The criminal part of it is this, Mr. Dalton: Cavanagh didn't report the case when he came down here, just went about leaving a trail of poison. Why didn't he report it? He should be arrested."

"Wait a moment," said Dalton. "Perhaps it wasn't pox, perhaps it was only mountain-fever. Cavanagh is not the kind of man to involve others in a pestilence. I reckon he knew it was nothing but a fever, and, not wishing to alarm his friends, he just slid into town and out again."

A flash of light, of heat, of joy went through Lee's heart as she listened to Dalton's defence of Cavanagh. "That was the reason why he rode away," she thought. "He was afraid of bringing harm to us." And this conviction lighted her face with a smile, even while the Forester continued his supposition by saying, "Of course, proper precautions should be taken, and as we are going up there, the Supervisor and I will see that a quarantine is established if we find it necessary."

Gregg was not satisfied: "Cavanagh admitted to the deputy and to me that he believed the case to be smallpox, and said that he had destroyed the camp and everything connected with it except the horse and the dog, and yet he comes down here infectin' everybody he meets." He turned to Lee. "You'd better burn the bed he slept on. He's left a trail of germs wherever he went. I say the

man is criminally liable, and should be jailed if he lives to get back to town."

Lee's mind was off now on another tangent. "Suppose it is true?" she asked herself. "Suppose he has fallen sick away up there, miles and miles from any nurse or doctor—"

"There's something queer about the whole business," pursued Gregg. "For instance, who is this assistant he's got? Johnson said there was an old man in ranger uniform potterin' round. Why didn't he send word by him? Why did he let me come to the door? He might have involved *me* in the disease. I tell you, if you don't take care of him the people of the county will."

The Forester looked grave. "If he *knew* it was pox and failed to report it he certainly did wrong; but you say he took care of this poor shepherd—nursed him till he died, and buried him, taking all precautions—you can't complain of that, can you? That's the act of a good ranger and a brave man. *You* wouldn't have done it!" he ended, addressing Gregg. "Sickness up there two full miles above sea-level is quite a different proposition from sickness in Sulphur City or the Fork. I shall not condemn Mr. Cavanagh till I hear his side of the story."

Lee turned a grateful glance upon him. "You must be right. I don't believe Mr. Cavanagh would deceive any one."

"Well, we'll soon know the truth," said Dalton, "for I'm going up there. If the ranger has been exposed, he must not be left alone."

"He ain't alone," declared the sheriff. "Tom 'phoned me that he had an assistant."

"Swenson, I suppose," said Redfield, who entered at this moment. "Swenson is his assistant."

"I didn't see him myself," Gregg continued, "but I understood the deputy to say that he was an old man."

"Swenson is a young man," corrected Redfield.

The sheriff insisted. "Tom said it was an old man—a stranger to him—tall, smooth-shaven, not very strong, he said—'peared to be a cook. He had helped nurse the dago, so Tom said."

"That's very curious," mused Redfield. "There isn't an old man in the service of this forest. There's a mistake somewhere."

"Well," concluded Gregg, "that's what he said. I thought at first it might be that old hobo Edwards, but this feller being in uniform and smooth-shaven—" His face changed, his voice deepened. "Say, by the Lord! I believe it was Edwards, and, furthermore, Edwards is the convict that Texas marshal was after the other day, and this man Cavanagh—your prize ranger—is harborin' him."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Redfield.

The sheriff banged his hand upon the table. "That's the whole mystery. I see it all now. He's up there concealing this man. He's given out this smallpox scare just to keep the officers away from him. Now you've got it!"

The thunder in his voice drew toward him all those who remained in the dining-room, and Lee found herself

ringed about by a dozen excited men. But she did not flinch; she was too deeply concerned over Cavanagh's fate to be afraid, and, besides, Redfield and the Forester were beside her.

The Supervisor was staggered by Gregg's accusation, and by certain confirmatory facts in his own possession, but he defended Cavanagh bravely. "You're crazy," he replied. "Why should Ross do such a foolish thing? What is his motive? What interest would he have in this man Edwards, whom you call a tramp? He can't be a relative and certainly not a friend of Cavanagh's, for you say he is a convict. Come, now, your hatred of Cavanagh has gone too far."

Gregg was somewhat cooled by this dash of reason, but replied: "I don't know what relation he is, but these are facts. He's concealing an escaped convict, and he knows it."

Dalton put in a quiet word. "What is the use of shouting a judgment against a man like Cavanagh before you know the facts? He's one of the best and ablest rangers on this forest. I don't know why he has resigned, but I'm sure—"

"Has he resigned?" asked Gregg, eagerly.

"He has."

"A damn good job for him. I was about to circulate a petition to have him removed."

"If all the stockmen in the valley had signed a petition against him, it wouldn't have done any good," replied Dalton. "We know a good man when we see him. I'm here to offer him promotion, not to punish him."

Lee, looking about at the faces of these men, and seeing disappointment in their faces, lost the keen sting of her own humiliation. "In the midst of such a fight as this, how can he give time or thought to me?" Painful as the admission was, she was forced to admit that she was a very humble factor in a very large campaign. "But suppose he falls ill!" Her face grew white and set, and her lips bitter. "That would be the final, tragic touch," she thought, "to have him come down of a plague from nursing one of Sam Gregg's sheep-herders." Aloud she said: "His resignation comes just in time, doesn't it? He can now be sick without loss to the service."

Dalton answered her. "The Supervisor has not accepted his resignation. On the contrary, I shall offer him a higher position. His career as a forester is only beginning. He would be foolish to give up the work now, when the avenues of promotion are just opening. I can offer him very soon the supervision of a forest."

As they talked Lee felt herself sinking the while her lover rose. It was all true. The Forester was right. Ross was capable of any work they might demand of him. He was too skilled, too intelligent, too manly, to remain in the forest, heroic as its duties seemed.

Upon this discussion, Lize, hobbling painfully, appeared. With a cry of surprise, Lee rose to meet her.

"Mother, you must not do this!"

She waved her away. "I'm all right," she said, "barring the big marbles in my slippers." Then she turned to Dalton. "Now what's it all about? Is it true that Ross is down?"

"No. So far as we know, he is well."

"Well, I'm going to find out. I don't intend to set here and have him up there without a cook or a nurse."

At this moment a tall, fair young fellow, dressed in a ranger's uniform, entered the room, and made his way directly to the spot where Lee, her mother, and Redfield were standing. "Mr. Supervisor, Cavanagh has sent me to tell you that he needs a doctor. He's got a sick man up at The Station, and he's afraid it's a case of smallpox." He turned to Lee. "He told me to tell you that he would have written, only he was afraid to even send a letter out."

"What does he need?" asked Redfield.

"He needs medicine and food, a doctor, and he ought to have a nurse."

"That's my job," said Lize.

"Nonsense!" said Redfield. "You're not fit to ride a mile. I won't hear of your going."

"You wait and see. I'm goin', and you can't stop me."

"Who is the man with him?" asked the Forester.

"I don't know. An old herder, he said. He said he could take care of him all right for the present, but that if he were taken down himself—"

Lee's mounting emotion broke from her in a little cry. "Oh, Mr. Redfield, please let me go too! I want to help—I must help!"

Redfield said: "I'll telephone to Sulphur City and ask Brooks to get a nurse, and come down as soon as possible. Meanwhile I'll go out to see what the conditions are."

"I'm going too, I tell you," announced Lize. "I've

had the cussed disease, and I'm not afraid of it. We had three sieges of it in my family. You get me up there, and I'll do the rest."

"But you are ill?"

"I was, but I'm not now." Her voice was firmer than it had been for days. "All I needed was something to do. Ross Cavanagh has been like a son to me for two years; he's the one man in this country I'd turn my hand over for—barrin' yourself, Reddy—and it's my job to see him through this pinch."

In spite of all opposition, she had her way. Returning to her room to get such clothing as she needed for her stay in the hills, she waited for Redfield to send a carriage to her. "I can't ride a horse no more," she sorrowfully admitted.

Lee's secret was no secret to any one there. Her wide eyes and heaving breast testified to the profound stir in her heart. She was in an anguish of fear lest Ross should already be in the grip of his loathsome enemy. That it had come to him by way of a brave and noble act only made the situation the more tragic.

XIV

THE PEST-HOUSE

CAVANAGH had kept a keen watch over Wetherford, and when one night the old man began to complain of the ache in his bones his decision was instant.

"You've got it," he said. "It's up to us to move down the valley to-morrow."

Wetherford protested that he would as soon die in the hills as in the valley. "I don't want Lee Virginia to know, but if I seem liable to fade out, I'd like Lize to be told that I didn't forget her, and that I came back to find out how she was. I hate to be a nuisance to you, and so I'll go down the valley if you say so."

As he was about to turn in that night Ross heard a horse cross the bridge, and with intent to warn the rider of his danger, went to the door and called out: "Halt! Who's there?"

"A friend," replied the stranger, in a weak voice.

Ross permitted his visitor to ride up to the pole. "I can't ask you in," he explained. "I've a sick man inside. Who are you, and what can I do for you?"

Notwithstanding this warning the rider dropped from his saddle, and came into the light which streamed from the door.

"My name is Dunn," he began. "I'm from Deer Creek."

"I know you," responded the ranger. "You're that rancher I saw working in the ditch the day I went to telephone, and you've come to tell me something about that murder."

The other man broke into a whimper. "I'm a law-abiding man, Mr. Cavanagh," he began, tremulously. "I've always kept the law, and never intended to have anything to do with that business. I was dragged into it against my will. I've come to you because you're an officer of the Federal law. You don't belong here. I trust you. You represent the President, and I want to tell you what I know—only I want you to promise not to bring me into it. I'm a man of a family, and I can't bear to have them know the truth."

There was deep agitation and complete sincerity in the rancher's choked and hesitant utterance, and Cavanagh turned cold with a premonition of what he was about to disclose. "I am not an officer of the law, Mr. Dunn, not in the sense you mean, but I will respect your wishes."

"I know that you are not an officer of the county law, but you're not a cattle-man. It is your business to keep the peace in the wild country, and you do it, everybody knows that; but I can't trust the officers of this country, they're all afraid of the cowboys. You're not afraid, and you represent the United States, and I'll tell you. I can't bear it any longer!" he wailed. "I must tell somebody. I can't sleep and I can't eat. I've been

like a man in a nightmare ever since. I had no hand in the killing—I didn't even see it done; but I knew it was going to happen. I saw the committee appointed. The meeting that decided it was held in my barn, but I didn't know what they intended to do. You believe me, don't you?" He peered up at Cavanagh with white face and wild eyes.

"Go on," replied the ranger; "I'll protect you—if I can. Go on. It's your duty—tell all you know."

The troubled man, after a little silence, resumed. "Sometimes I feel that I'd be happier in jail than I am walking about in the sunshine. I never dreamed civilized men could do such deeds. I thought they were only going to scare the herders and drive them out, as they've done so many times before. I can see now that they used my barn for a meeting-place because everybody believed me to be a man of peace. And I am. I'm over seventy years of age, Mr. Cavanagh, and I've been a law-abiding citizen all my life."

His mind, shattered by the weight of his ghastly secret, was in confusion, and, perceiving this, Cavanagh began to question him gently. One by one he procured the names of those who voted to "deal with" the herders. One by one he obtained also the list of those named on "the Committee of Reprisal," and as the broken man delivered himself of these accusing facts he grew calmer. "I didn't know—I couldn't *believe*—that the men on that committee could chop and burn—" His utterance failed him again, and he fell silent abruptly.

"They must have been drunk—mad drunk," retorted

Cavanagh. "And yet who would believe that even drink could inflame white men to such devil's work? When did you first know what had been done?"

"That night after it was done one of the men, my neighbor, who was drawn on the committee, came to my house and asked me to give him a bed. He was afraid to go home. 'I can't face my wife and children,' he said. He told me what he'd seen, and then when I remembered that it had all been decided in my stable, and the committee appointed there, I began to tremble. You believe I'm telling the truth, don't you?" he again asked, with piteous accent.

"Yes, I believe you. You must tell this story to the judge. It will end the reign of the cattle-men."

"Oh no, I can't do that."

"You must do that. It is your duty as a Christian man and citizen."

"No, no; I'll stay and help you—I'll do anything but that. I'm afraid to tell what I know. They would burn me alive. I'm not a Western man. I've never been in a criminal court. I don't belong to this wild country. I came out here because my daughter is not strong, and now—" He broke down altogether, and leaning against his horse's side, sobbed pitifully.

Cavanagh, convinced that the old man's mind was too deeply affected to enable him to find his way back over the rough trail that night, spoke to him gently. "I'll get you something to eat," he said. "Sit down here, and rest and compose yourself."

Wetherford turned a wild eye on the ranger as he re-

entered. "Who's out there?" he asked. "Is it the marshal?"

"No, it's only one of the ranchers from below; he's tired and hungry, and I'm going to feed him," Ross replied, filled with a vivid sense of the diverse characters of the two men he was serving.

Dunn received the food with an eager hand, and after he had finished his refreshment, Cavanagh remarked: "The whole country should be obliged to you for your visit to me. I shall send your information to Supervisor Redfield."

"Don't use my name," he begged. "They will kill me if they find out that I have told. We were all sworn to secrecy, and if I had not seen that fire—that pile of bodies—"

"I know, I know! It horrified me. It made me doubt humanity," responded Cavanagh. "We of the North cry out against the South for lynching black rapers; but here, under our eyes, goes on an equally horrible display of rage over the mere question of temporary advantage, over the appropriation of free grass, which is a Federal resource—something which belongs neither to one claimant nor to the other, but to the people, and should be of value to the people. There is some excuse for shooting and burning a man who violates a woman, but what shall we say of those who kill and dismember men over the possession of a plot of grass? You must bring these men to punishment."

Dunn could only shiver in his horror and repeat his fear. "They'll kill me if I do."

Cavanagh at last said: "You must not attempt to ride back to-night. I can't give you lodging in the cabin, because my patient is sick of smallpox, but you can camp in the barn till morning, then ride straight back to my friend Redfield, and tell him what you've told me. He will see that you are protected. Make your deposition and leave the country, if you are afraid to remain."

In the end the rancher promised to do this, but his tone was that of a broken and distraught dotard. All the landmarks of his life seemed suddenly shifted. All the standards of his life hitherto orderly and fixed were now confused and whirling, and Cavanagh, understanding something of his plight, pitied him profoundly. It was of a piece with this ironic story that the innocent man should suffer madness and the guilty go calmly about their business of grazing their cattle on the stolen grass.

Meanwhile the sufferings of his other patient were increasing, and he was forced to give up all hope of getting him down the trail next morning; and when Swenson, the Forest Guard from the south Fork, knocked at the door to say that he had been to the valley, and that the doctor was coming up with Redfield and the District Forester, Ross thanked him, but ordered him to go into camp across the river, and to warn everybody to keep clear of the cabin. "Put your packages down outside the door," he added, "and take charge of the situation on the outside. I'll take care of the business inside."

Wetherford was in great pain, but the poison of the disease had misted his brain, and he no longer worried over the possible disclosure of his identity. At times he

lost the sense of his surroundings and talked of his prison life, or of the long ride northward. Once he rose in his bed to beat off the wolves which he said were attacking his pony.

He was a piteous figure as he struggled thus, and it needed neither his relationship to Lee nor his bravery in caring for the Basque herder to fill the ranger's heart with a desire to relieve his suffering. "Perhaps I should have sent for Lize at once," he mused, as the light brought out the red signatures of the plague.

Once the old man looked up with wide, dark, unseeing eyes and murmured, "I don't seem to know you."

"I'm a friend—my name is Cavanagh."

"I can't place you," he sadly admitted. "I feel pretty bad. If I ever get out of this place I'm going back to the Fork; I'll get a gold-mine, then I'll go back and make up for what Lize has gone through. I'm afraid to go back now."

"All right," Ross soothingly agreed; "but you'll have to keep quiet till you get over this fever you're suffering from."

"If Lize weren't so far away, she'd come and nurse me—I'm pretty sick. This stone-cutting—this inside work is hell on an old cow-puncher like me."

Swenson came back to say that probably Redfield and the doctor would reach The Station by noon, and thereafter, for the reason that Cavanagh expected their coming, the hours dragged wofully. It was after one o'clock before Swenson announced that two teams were

coming with three men and two women in them. They'll be here in half an hour."

The ranger's heart leaped. Two women! Could one of them be Lee Virginia? What folly—what sweet, desperate folly! And the other—she could not be Lize —for Lize was too feeble to ride so far. "Stop them on the other side of the bridge," he commanded. "Don't let them cross the creek on any pretext."

As he stood in the door the flutter of a handkerchief, the waving of a hand, made his pulses glow and his eyes grow dim. It was Virginia!

Lize did not flutter a kerchief or wave a hand, but when Swenson stopped the carriage at the bridge she said: "No, you don't! I'm going across. I'm going to see Ross, and if he needs help, I'm going to roll up my sleeves and take hold."

Cavanagh saw her advancing, and, as she came near enough for his voice to reach her, he called out: "Don't come any closer! Stop, I tell you!" His voice was stern. "You must not come a step nearer. Go back across the dead-line and stay there. No one but the doctor shall enter this door. Now that's final."

"I want to help!" she protested.

"I know you do; but I won't have it. This quarantine is real, and it goes!"

"But suppose you yourself get sick?"

"We'll cross *that* bridge when we get to it. I'm all right so far, and I'll call for help when I need it."

His tone was imperative, and she obeyed, grumbling about his youth and the value of his life to the service.

"That's all very nice," he replied; "but I'm in it, and I don't intend to expose you or any one else to the contagion."

"I've had it once," she asserted.

He looked at her, and smiled in recognition of her subterfuge.

"No matter; you're ailing, and might take it again, so toddle back. It's mighty good of you, and of Lee, to come—but there isn't a thing you can do, and here's the doctor," he added, as he recognized the young student who passed for a physician in the Fork. He was a beardless youth of small experience and no great courage, and as he approached with hesitant feet he asked:

"Are you sure it's smallpox?"

Cavanagh smiled. "The indications are all that way. That last importation of Basques brought it probably from the steerage of the ship. I'm told they've had several cases over in the Basin."

"Have you been vaccinated?"

"Yes; when I was in the army."

"Then you're all right."

"I hope so."

There was a certain comic relief in this long-distance diagnosing of a "case" by a boy, and yet the tragic fact beneath it all was that Wetherford was dying, a broken and dishonored husband and father, and that his identity must be concealed from his wife and daughter, who were much more deeply concerned over the ranger than over the desperate condition of his patient. "And this must

continue to be so," Cavanagh decided. And as he stood there looking toward the girl's fair figure on the bridge, he came to the final, fixed determination never to speak one word or make a sign that might lead to the dying man's identification. "Of what use is it?" he asked himself. "Why should even Lize be made to suffer? Wetherford's poor misspent life is already over for her, and for Lee he is only a dim memory."

Redfield came near enough to see that the ranger's face, though tired, showed no sign of illness, and was relieved. "Who is this old herder?" he asked. "Hasn't he any relatives in the country?"

"He came from Texas, so he said. You're not coming in?" he broke off to say to the young physician, whom Lize had shamed into returning to the cabin.

"I suppose I'll have to," he protested, weakly.

"I don't see the need of it. The whole place reeks of the poison, and you might carry it away with you. Unless you insist on coming in, and are sure you can prevent further contagion, I shall oppose your entrance. You are in the company of others—I must consider their welfare."

The young fellow was relieved. "Well, so long as we know what it is I can prescribe just as well right here," he said, and gave directions for the treatment, which the ranger agreed to carry out.

"I tried to bring a nurse," explained Redfield, "but I couldn't find anybody but old Lize who would come."

"I don't blame them," replied Ross. "It isn't a nice job, even when you've got all the conveniences."

His eyes, as he spoke, were on the figure of Lee, who still stood on the bridge awed and worshipful, barred of approach by Lize. "She shall not know," he silently vowed. "Why put her through useless suffering and shame? Edward Wetherford's disordered life is near its end. To betray him to his wife and daughter would be but the reopening of an old wound."

He was stirred to the centre of his heart by the coming of Lee Virginia, so sweet and brave and trustful. His stern mood melted as he watched her there waiting, with her face turned toward him, longing to help. "She would have come alone if necessary," he declared, with a fuller revelation of the self-sacrificing depth of her love, "and she would come to my side this moment if I called her."

To the District Forester he said no more than to Redfield. "Edwards is evidently an old soldier," he declared. "He was sent up here by Gregg to take the place of a sick herder. He took care of that poor herder till he died, and then helped me to bury him; now here he lies a victim to his own sense of duty, and I shall not desert him." And to himself he added: "Nor betray him."

He went back to his repulsive service sustained and soothed by the little camp of faithful friends on the other side of the stream. The tender grace of the girl's attitude, her air of waiting, of anxiety, of readiness to serve, made him question the basis of his family pride. He recognized in her the spirit of her sire, tempered, sweetened, made more stable, by something drawn from unknown sources. At the moment he felt that Lee was

not merely his equal but his superior in purity of character and in purpose. "What nonsense we talk of heredity, of family," he thought.

Standing over the wasted body of his patient, he asked again: "Why let even Lize know? To her Ed Wetherford is dead. She remembers him now as a young, dashing, powerful horseman, a splendid animal, a picturesque lover. Why wring her heart by permitting her to see this wreck of what was once her pride?"

As for Wetherford himself, nothing mattered very much. He spoke of the past now and then, but not in the phrase of one who longs for the return of happy days—rather in the voice of one who murmurs a half-forgotten song. He called no more for his wife and child, and if he had done so Cavanagh would have reasoned that the call arose out of weakness, and that his better self, his real self, would still desire to shield his secret from his daughter.

And this was true, for during one of his clearest moments Wetherford repeated his wish to die a stranger. "I'm goin' out like the old-time West, a rag of what I once was. Don't let them know—put no name over me—just say: 'An old cow-puncher lies here.'"

Cavanagh's attempt to change his hopeless tone proved unavailing. Enfeebled by his hardships and his prison life, he had little reserve force upon which to draw in fighting such an enemy. He sank soon after this little speech into a coma which continued to hold him in its unbroken grasp as night fell.

Meantime, seeing no chance of aiding the ranger,

Redfield and the Forester prepared to return, but Lee, reinforced by her mother, refused to accompany them. "I shall stay here," she said, "till he is safely out of it—till I *know* that he is beyond all danger."

Redfield did not urge her to return as vigorously as Dalton expected him to do, but when he understood the girl's desire to be near her lover, he took off his hat and bowed to her. "You are entirely in the right," he said. "Here is where you belong."

Redfield honored Lize for her sympathetic support of her daughter's resolution, and expressed his belief that Ross would escape the plague. "I feel that his splendid vigor, combined with the mountain air, will carry him through—even if he should prove not to be immune. I shall run up again day after to-morrow. I shall be very anxious. What a nuisance that the telephone-line is not extended to this point. Ross has been insisting on its value for months."

Lee saw the doctor go with some dismay. Young as he was, he was at least a reed to cling to in case the grisly terror seized upon the ranger. "Mr. Redfield, can't you send a real doctor? It seems so horrible to be left here without instructions."

The Forester, before going, again besought Cavanagh not to abandon his work in the Forestry Service, and intimated that at the proper time advancement would be offered him. "The whole policy is but beginning," said he, "and a practical ranger with your experience and education will prove of greatest value."

To this Ross made reply. "At the moment I feel that

no promise of advancement could keep me in this country of grafters, poachers, and assassins. I'm weary of it, and all it stands for. However, if I could aid in extending the supervision of the public ranges and in stopping forever this murder and burning that goes on outside the forestry domain, I might remain in the West."

"Would you accept the supervisorship of the Washakie Forest?" demanded Dalton.

Taken by surprise, he stammered: "I might; but am I the man?"

"You are. Your experience fits you for a position where the fight is hot. The Washakie Forest is even more a bone of contention than this. We have laid out the lines of division between the sheep and the cows, and it will take a man to enforce our regulations. You will have the support of the best citizens. They will all rally, with you as leader, and so end the warfare there."

"It can never end till Uncle Sam puts rangers over every section of public lands and lays out the grazing lines as we have done in this forest," retorted Cavanagh.

"I know; but to get that requires a revolution in the whole order of things." Then his fine young face lighted up. "But we'll get it. Public sentiment is coming our way. The old order is already so eaten away that only its shell remains."

"It may be. If these assassins are punished I shall feel hopeful of the change."

"I shall recommend you for the supervisorship of the Washakie Forest," concluded Dalton, decisively. "And so good-bye and good-luck."

England, his blood relatives, even the Redfields, seemed very remote to the ranger, as he stood in his door that night and watched the sparkle of Swenson's camp-fire through the trees. With the realization that there waited a brave girl of the type that loves single-heartedly, ready to sacrifice everything to the welfare of her idealized subject, he felt unworthy, selfish, vain.

"If I should fall sick she would insist on nursing me. For her sake I must give Swenson the most rigid orders not to allow her—no matter what happens—to approach. I will not have her touched by this thing."

Beside the blaze Lee and her mother sat for the most part in silence, with nothing to do but to wait the issue of the struggle going on in the cabin, so near and yet so inaccessible to their will. It was as if a magic wall, crystal-clear yet impenetrable, shut them away from the man whose quiet heroism was the subject of their constant thought.

To the girl this ride up into her lover's world had been both exalting and awesome—not merely because the rough and precipitous road took her closer to her lover while placing her farther from medical aid, but also because it was so vast a world, so unpeopled and so beautiful.

It was marvellous, as the dusk fell and the air nipped keen, to see how Lize Wetherford renewed her youth. The excitement seemed to have given her a fresh hold on life. She was wearied but by no means weakened by her ride, and ate heartily of the rude fare which Swenson set before her. "This is what I needed," she exultantly said;

"the open air and these trout. I feel ten years younger already. Many's the night I've camped on the range with your father with nothing but a purp-tent to cover us both, and the wolves howling round us. I'd feel pretty fairly gay if it weren't for Ross over there in that cabin playin' nurse and cook all by his lonesomeness."

Lee expressed a deep satisfaction from the fact of their nearness. "If he is ill we can help him," she reiterated.

She had put behind her all the doubt and fear which his abrupt desertion of her had caused, and, though he had not been able to speak a word to her, his self-sacrifice had made amends. She excused it all as part of his anxious care. Whatever the mood of that other day had been, it had given way to one that was lofty and deeply altruistic. Her one anxiety now was born of a deepening sense of his danger, but against this she bent the full strength of her will. "He shall not die," she declared beneath her breath. "God will not permit it."

There was a touch of frost in the air as they went to their beds, and, though she shivered, Lize was undismayed. "There's nothing the matter with my heart," she exulted. "I don't believe there was anything really serious the matter with me, anyway. I reckon I was just naturally grouchy and worried over you and Ross."

Lee Virginia was now living a romance stranger and more startling than any she had ever read. In imagination she was able to look back and down upon the Fork as if she had been carried into another world—a world

that was at once primeval yet peaceful: a world of dreaming trees, singing streams, and silent peaks; a realm in which law and order reigned, maintained by one determined young man whose power was derived from the President himself. She felt safe—entirely safe—for just across the roaring mountain torrent the two intrepid guardians of the forest were encamped. One of them, it is true, came of Swedish parentage and the other was a native of England, but they were both American in the high sense of being loyal to the Federal will, and she trusted them more unqestioningly than any other men in all that West save only Redfield. She had no doubt there were others equally loyal, equally to be trusted, but she did not know them.

She rose to a complete understanding of Cavanagh's love for "the high country" and his enthusiasm for the cause, a cause which was able to bring together the student from Yale and the graduates of Bergen and of Oxford, and make them comrades in preserving the trees and streams of the mountain States against the encroachments of some of their own citizens, who were openly, short-sightedly, and cynically bent upon destruction, spoliation, and misuse.

She had listened to the talk of the Forester and the Supervisor, and she had learned from them that Cavanagh was sure of swift advancement, now that he had shown his courage and his skill; and the thought that he might leave the State to take charge of another forest brought her some uneasiness, for she and Lize had planned to go to Sulphur City. She had consented

to this because it still left to her the possibility of occasionally seeing or hearing from Cavanagh. But the thought that he might go away altogether took some of the music out of the sound of the stream and made the future vaguely sad.

XV

WETHERFORD PASSES ON

For the next two days Cavanagh slept but little, for his patient grew steadily worse. As the flame of his fever mounted, Wetherford pleaded for air. The ranger threw open the doors, admitting freely the cool, sweet mountain wind. "He might as well die of a draught as smother," was his thought; and by the use of cold cloths he tried to allay the itching and the pain.

"What I am doing may be all wrong," he admitted to Swenson, who came often to lean upon the hitching-pole and offer aid. "I have had no training as a nurse, but I must be doing something. The man is burning up, and hasn't much vitality to spare. I knew a ranger had to be all kinds of things, cowboy, horse-doctor, axe-man, carpenter, surveyor, and all the rest of it, but I didn't know that he had to be a trained nurse in addition."

"How do you feel yourself?" asked his subordinate, anxiously.

"Just tired; nothing more. I reckon I am going to escape. I should be immune, but you never can tell. The effect of vaccination wears off after a few years."

"The women folks over there are terribly worried, and

the old lady has made me promise to call her in if you show the slightest signs of coming down."

"Tell her to rest easy. I am keeping mighty close watch over myself, and another night will tell the story so far as the old man is concerned. I wish I had a real doctor, but I don't expect any. It is a long hard climb up here for one of those tenderfeet."

He returned to his charge, and Swenson walked slowly away, back to the camp, oppressed with the sense of his utter helplessness.

Again and again during the day Lee Virginia went to the middle of the bridge, which was the dead-line, and there stood to catch some sign, some wave of the hand from her lover. Strange courtship! and yet hour by hour the tie which bound these young souls together was strengthened. She cooked for him in the intervals of her watch and sent small pencilled notes to him, together with the fish and potatoes, but no scrap of paper came back to her — so scrupulous was Cavanagh to spare her from the faintest shadow of danger.

Swenson brought verbal messages, it was true, but they were by no means tender, for Cavanagh knew better than to intrust any fragile vessel of sentiment to this stalwart young woodsman. Now that Lee knew the mysterious old man was dying, she longed for his release—for his release would mean her lover's release. She did not stop to think that it would be long, very long, before she could touch Cavanagh's hand or even speak with him face to face. At times under Swenson's plain speaking

she grew faint with the horror of the struggle which was going on in that silent cabin.

This leprous plague, this offspring of crowded and dirty tenements and of foul ship-steerages, seemed doubly unholy here in the clean sanity of the hills. It was a profanation, a hideous curse. "If it should seize upon Ross—" Words failed to express her horror, her hate of it. "Oh God, save him!" she prayed a hundred times each day.

Twice in the night she rose from her bed to listen, to make sure that Cavanagh was not calling for help. The last time she looked out, a white veil of frost lay on the grass, and the faint light of morning was in the east, and in the exquisite clarity of the air, in the serene hush of the dawn, the pestilence appeared but as the ugly emanation of disordered sleep. The door of the ranger's cabin stood open, but all was silent. "He is snatching a half-hour's sleep," she decided.

If the guard had carried in his mind the faintest intention of permitting Lize to go to Cavanagh's aid, that intention came to no issue, for with the coming of the third night Wetherford was unconscious and unrecognizable to any one who had known him in the days of "the free range." Lithe daredevil in those days, expert with rope and gun, he was as far from this scarred and swollen body as the soaring eagle is from the carrion which he sees and scorns.

He was going as the Wild West was going, discredited, ulcerated, poisoned, incapable of rebirth, yet carrying something fine to his grave. He had acted the part of a

brave man, that shall be said of him. He had gone to the rescue of the poor Basque, instinctively, with the same reckless disregard of consequences to himself which marked his character when as a cow-boss on the range he had set aside the most difficult tasks for his own rope or gun. His regard for the ranger into whose care he was now about to commit his wife and daughter, persisted in spite of his suffering. In him was his hope, his stay. Once again, in a lucid moment, he reverted to the promise which he had drawn from Cavanagh.

"If I go, you must take care—of my girl—take care of Lize, too. Promise me that. Do you promise?" he insisted.

"I promise—on honor," Ross repeated, and, with a faint pressure of his hand (so slender and weak), Wetherford sank away into the drowse which deepened hour by hour, broken now and then by convulsions, which wrung the stern heart of the ranger till his hands trembled for pity.

All day, while the clouds sailed by, white as snow and dazzlingly pure, while the stream roared with joy of exploration, and the sunshine fell in dazzling floods upon the world, the ranger bent above his ward or walked the floor of his cabin marvelling that the air and light of this high place should be so powerless to check the march of that relentless plague. It seemed that to open the doors, to fill the room with radiance, must surely kill the mutinous motes which warred upon the tortured body. But in the midst of nature's sovereign charm the reek of the conflict went up; and he wondered whether

even the vigor which his outdoor life had built up could withstand the strain another day.

Once Lee Virginia approached close enough to hear his voice as he warned her to go back. "You can do nothing," he called to her. "Please go away." His face was haggard with weariness, and her heart filled with bitter resentment to think that this repulsive warfare, this painful duty, should be thrust upon one so fine.

He himself felt as though his youth were vanishing, and that in these few days he had entered upon the sober, care-filled years of middle life. The one sustaining thought, his one allurement, lay in the near presence of the girl to whom he could call, but could not utter one tender word. She was there where he could see her watching, waiting at the bridge. "The sound of the water helps me bear the suspense," she said to Swenson, and the occasional sight of her lover, the knowledge that he was still unbroken, kept her from despair.

The day was well advanced when the sound of rattling pebbles on the hill back of his cabin drew his attention, and a few moments later a man on a weary horse rode up to his door and dropped heavily from the saddle. He was a small, dark individual, with spectacles, plainly of the city.

"Beware! Smallpox!" called Ross, as his visitor drew near the door.

The new-comer waved his hand contemptuously. "I've had it. Are you Ross Cavanagh?"

"I am!"

"My name is Hartley. I represent the Denver

Round-up. I'm interested in this sheep-herder killing—merely as a reporter," he added, with a fleeting smile. "Did you know old man Dunn, of Deer Creek, had committed suicide?"

Cavanagh started, and his face set. "No!"

"They found him shot through the neck, and dying—this morning. As he was gasping his last breath, he said, 'The ranger knows,' and when they asked, 'What ranger,' he said, 'Cavanagh.' When I heard that I jumped a horse and beat 'em all over here. Is this true? Did he tell you who the murderers are?"

Cavanagh did not answer at once. He was like a man caught on a swaying bridge, and his first instinct was to catch the swing, to get his balance. "Wait a minute! What is it all to you?"

Again that peculiar grin lighted the small man's dark, unwholesome face. "It's a fine detective stunt, and besides it means twenty dollars per column and mebbe a 'boost.' I can't wait, you can't wait! It's up to us to strike *now!* If these men knew you have their names they'd hike for Texas or the high seas. Come now! Everybody tells me you're one of these idealistic high-brow rangers who care more for the future of the West than most natural-born Westerners. What's your plan? If you'll yoke up with me we'll run these devils into the earth and win great fame, and you'll be doing the whole country a service."

The ranger studied the small figure before him with penetrating gaze. There was deliberative fearlessness in the stranger's face and eyes, and notwithstanding his

calm, almost languid movement, restless energy could be detected in his voice.

"What is your plan?" the ranger asked.

"Get ourselves deputized by the court, and jump these men before they realize that there's anything doing. They count the whole country on their side, but they're mistaken. They've outdone themselves this time, and a tremendous reaction has set in. Everybody knows you've held an even hand over these warring Picts and Scots, and the court will be glad to deputize you to bring them to justice. The old sheriff is paralyzed. Everybody knows that the assassins are prominent cattle-ranchers, and yet no one dares move. It's up to you fellows, who represent law and order, to act quick."

Cavanagh followed him with complete comprehension, and a desire to carry out the plan seized upon him.

"I'd do it if I could," he said, "but it happens I am nursing a sick man. I am, perhaps, already exposed to the same disease. I can't leave here for a week or more. It would not be right for me to expose others—"

"Don't worry about that. Take a hot bath, fumigate your clothing, shave your head. I'll fix you up, and I'll get some one to take your place." Catching sight of Swenson and Lize on the bridge, he asked: "Who are those people? Can't they take your nursing job?"

"No!" answered Cavanagh, bluntly. "It's no use, I can't join you in this—at least, not now."

"But you'll give me the names which Dunn gave you?"

"No, I can't do that. I shall tell the Supervisor, and

he can act as he sees fit—for the present I'm locked up here."

The other man looked the disappointment he felt. "I'm sorry you don't feel like opening up. You know perfectly well that nothing will ever be done about this thing unless the press insists upon it. It's up to you and me (me representing 'the conscience of the East'"—here he winked an eye—"and you Federal authority) to do what we can to bring these men to their punishment. Better reconsider. I'm speaking now as a citizen as well as a reporter."

There was much truth in what he said, but Cavanagh refused to go further in the matter until he had consulted with Redfield.

"Very well," replied Hartley, "that's settled. By-the-way, who is your patient?"

Eloquently, concisely, Ross told the story. "Just a poor old mounted hobo, a survival of the cowboy West," he said; "but he had the heart of a hero in him, and I'm doing my best to save him."

"Keep him in the dark, that's the latest theory—or under a red light. White light brings out the ulcers."

"He hates darkness; that's one reason why I've opened the doors and windows."

"All wrong! According to Finsen, he wouldn't pit in the dark. However, it doesn't matter on a cowboy. You've a great story yourself. There's a fine situation here which I'll play up if you don't object."

Cavanagh smiled. "Would my objection have any weight?"

The reporter laughed. "Not much; I've got to carry back some sort of game. Well, so long! I must hit the trail over the hill."

Cavanagh made civil answer, and returned to his patient more than half convinced that Hartley was right. The "power of the press" might prove to be a very real force in this pursuit.

As the journalist was about to mount his horse he discovered Lee Virginia on the other side of the creek. "Hello!" said he, "I wonder what this pretty maiden means?" And, dropping his bridle-rein again, he walked down to the bridge.

Swenson interposed his tall figure. "What do you want?" he asked, bluntly. "You don't want to get too close. You've been talking to the ranger."

Hartley studied him coolly. "Are you a ranger, too?"

"No, only a guard."

"Why are you leaving Cavanagh to play it alone in there?"

Lee explained. "He won't let any of us come near him."

"Quite right," retorted Hartley, promptly. "They say smallpox has lost its terrors, but when you're eight hours' hard trail from a doctor, or a hospital, it's still what I'd call a formidable enemy. However, Cavanagh's immune, so he says."

"We don't know that," Lee said, and her hands came together in a spasm of fear. "Are you a doctor?"

"No, I'm only a newspaper man; but I've had a lot

of experience with plagues of all sorts—had the yellow fever in Porto Rico, and the typhoid in South Africa; that's why I'm out here richochetting over the hills. But who are you, may I ask? You look like the rose of Sharon."

"My name is Lee Wetherford," she answered, with childish directness, for there was something compelling in the man's voice and eyes. "And this is my mother." She indicated Lize, who was approaching.

"*You* are not out here for your health," he stated, rather thoughtfully. "How happens it you're here?"

"I was born here—in the Fork."

His face remained expressionless. "I don't believe it. Can such maidens come out of Roaring Fork—nit! But I don't mean that. What are you doing up here in this wilderness?"

Lize took a part in the conversation. "Another inspector?" she asked, as she lumbered up.

"That's me," he replied; "Sherlock Holmes, Vidocque, all rolled into one."

"My mother," again volunteered Lee.

Hartley's eyes expressed incredulity; but he did not put his feelings into words, for he perceived in Lize a type with which he was entirely familiar—one to be handled with care. "What are you two women doing here? Are you related to one of these rangers?"

Lize resented this. "You're asking a good many questions, Mr. Man."

"That's my trade," was the unabashed reply, "and I'm not so old but that I can rise to a romantic situation."

Thereupon he dropped all direct interrogation, and with an air of candor told the story of his mission. Lize, entirely sympathetic, invited him to lunch, and he was soon in possession of their story, even to the tender relationship between Lee Virginia and the plague-besieged forest ranger.

"We're not so mighty disinterested," he said, referring to his paper. "*The Round-up* represents the New West in part, but to us the New West means opportunity to loot water-sites and pile up unearned increment. Oh yes, we're on the side of the fruit and alfalfa grower, because it pays. If the boss of my paper happened to be in the sheep business, as Senator Blank White is, we would sing a different tune. Or if I were a Congressman representing a district of cattle-men, I'd be very slow about helping to build up any system that would make me pay for my grass. As it is, I'm commissioned to make it hot for the ranchers that killed those dagoes, and I'm going to do it. If this country had a man like Cavanagh for sheriff, we'd have the murderers in two days. He knows who the butchers are, and I'd like his help; but he's nailed down here, and there's no hope of his getting away. A few men like him could civilize this cursed country."

Thereupon he drew from three pairs of lips a statement of the kind of man Ross Cavanagh was, but most significant of all were the few words of the girl, to whom this man of the pad and pencil was a magician, capable of exalting her hero and of advancing light and civilization by the mere motion of his hand. She liked him, and grew

more and more willing to communicate, and he, perceiving in her something unusual, lingered on questioning. Then he rose. "I must be going," he said to Lee. "You've given me a lovely afternoon."

Lee Virginia was all too ignorant of the ways of reporters to resent his note-taking, and she accepted his hand, believing him to be the sincere admirer of her ranger. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going back to Sulphur to spread the report of Cavanagh's quarantine." Again that meaning smile. "I don't want any other newspaper men mixed up in my game. I'm lonesome Ned in stunts like this, and I hope if they *do* come up you'll be judiciously silent. Goodbye."

Soon after the reporter left, Cavanagh called to Swenson: "The old man can't last through another such a night as last night was, and I wish you would persuade Mrs. Wetherford and her daughter to return to the valley. They can do nothing here—absolutely *nothing*. Please say that."

Swenson repeated his commands with all the emphasis he could give them, but neither Lize nor Lee would consent to go. "It would be heathenish to leave him alone in this lonesome hole," protested Lize.

"I shall stay till he is free," added Lee. And with uneasy heart she crossed the bridge and walked on and on toward the cabin till she was close enough to detect the lines of care on her lover's haggard face.

"Stop!" he called, sharply. "Keep away. Why don't you obey me? Why don't you go back to the valley?"

"Because I will not leave you alone—I can't! Please let me stay!"

"I beg of you go back."

The roar of the stream made it necessary to speak loudly, and he could not put into his voice the tenderness he felt at the moment, but his face was knotted with pain as he asked: "Don't you see you add to my uneasiness—my pain?"

"We're so anxious about you," she answered. "It seems as though we should be doing something to help you."

He understood, and was grateful for the tenderness which brought her so near to him, but he was forced to be stern.

"There is nothing you can do—nothing more than you are doing. It helps me to know that you are there, but you must not cross the bridge. Please go back!" There was pleading as well as command in his voice, and with a realization of the passion his voice conveyed, she retraced her steps, her heart beating quickly with the joy which his words conveyed.

At sunset Redfield returned, bringing with him medicines but no nurse. "Nobody will come up here," he said. "I reckon Ross is doomed to fight it out alone. The solitude, the long trail, scares the bravest of them away. I tried and tried—no use. Eleanor would have come, of course—demanded to come; but I would not permit that. She commissioned me to bring you both down to the ranch."

Lee Virginia thanked him, but reiterated her wish to stay until all possible danger to Cavanagh was over.

Redfield crossed the bridge, and laid the medicines down outside the door.

"The nurse from Sulphur refused to come when she found that her patient was in a mountain cabin. I'm sorry, old man; I did the best I could."

"Never mind," replied Cavanagh. "I'm still free from any touch of fever. I'm tired, of course, but good for another night of it. My main anxiety concerns Lee —get her to go home with you if you can."

"I'll do the best I can," responded Redfield, "but meanwhile you must *not* think of getting out of the Forest Service. I have some cheering news for you. The President has put a good man into the chief's place."

Cavanagh's face lighted up. "That 'll help some," he exclaimed; "but who's the man?"

Redfield named him. "He was a student under the chief, and the chief says he's all right, which satisfies me. Furthermore, he's a real forester, and not a political jobber or a corporation attorney."

"That's good," repeated Cavanagh; "and yet—" he said, sadly, "it leaves the chief out just the same."

"No, the chief is not out. He's where he can fight for the idea to better advantage than when he was a subordinate under another man. Anyhow, he asks us all to line up for the work and not to mind him. The work, he says, is bigger than any man. Here's that resignation of yours," he said, taking Cavanagh's letter from his pocket; "I didn't put it on file. What shall I do with it?"

"Throw it to me," said Cavanagh, curtly.

Redfield tossed it over the hitching-pole, and Ross took it up, looked at it for a moment in silence, then tore it into bits and threw it on the ground.

"What are your orders, Mr. Supervisor?" he asked, with a faint, quizzical smile around his eyes.

"There's nothing you can do but take care of this man. But as soon as you are able to ride again, I've got some special work for you. I want you to join with young Bingham, the ranger on Rock Creek, and line up the 'Triangle' cattle. Murphy is reported to have thrown on the forest nearly a thousand head more than his permit calls for. I want you to see about that. Then complete your maps so that I can turn them in on the first of November, and about the middle of December you are to take charge of this forest in my stead. Eleanor has decided to take the children abroad for a couple of years, and as I am to be over there part of the time, I don't feel justified in holding down the Supervisor's position. I shall resign in your favor. Wait, now!" he called, warningly. "The District Forester and I framed all this up as we rode down the hill yesterday, and it goes. Oh yes, there's one thing more. Old man Dunn—"

"I know."

"How did you learn it?"

"A reporter came boiling over the ridge about noon to-day, wanting me to give him the names which Dunn had given me. I was strongly tempted to do as he asked me to—you know these newspaper men are sometimes

the best kind of detectives for running down criminals; but on second thought I concluded to wait until I had discussed the matter with you. I haven't much faith in the county authorities."

"Ordinarily I would have my doubts myself," replied Redfield, "but the whole country is roused, and we're going to round up these men this time, sure. The best men and the big papers all over the West are demanding an exercise of the law, and the reward we have offered—" He paused, suddenly. "By-the-way, that reward will come to you if you can bring about the arrest of the criminals."

"The reward should go to Dunn's family," replied the ranger, soberly. "Poor chap, he's sacrificed himself for the good of the State."

"That's true. His family is left in bad shape—"

Cavanagh broke off the conversation suddenly. "I must go back to—" he had almost said "back to Wetherford." "My patient needs me!" he exclaimed.

"How does he seem?"

"He's surely dying. In my judgment he can't last the night, but so long as he's conscious it's up to me to be on the spot."

Redfield walked slowly back across the river, thinking on the patient courage of the ranger.

"It isn't the obvious kind of thing, but it's courage all the same," he said to himself.

Meanwhile Lize and Virginia, left alone beside the fire, had drawn closer together.

The girl's face, so sweet and so pensive, wrought

strongly upon the older woman's sympathy. Something of her own girlhood came back to her. Being freed from the town and all its associations, she became more considerate, more thoughtful. She wished to speak, and yet she found it very hard to begin. At last she said, with a touch of mockery in her tone: "You like Ross Cavanagh almost as well as I do myself, don't you?"

The girl flushed a little, but her eyes remained steady. "I would not be here if I did not," she replied.

"Neither would I. Well, now, I have got something to tell you—something I ought to have told you long ago —something that Ross ought to know. I intended to tell you that first day you came back, but I couldn't somehow get to it, and I kept putting it off and putting it off till—well, then I got fond of you, and every day made it harder." Here she made her surpreme effort. "Child, I'm an old bluff. I'm not your mother at all."

Lee stared at her in amazement. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean your real mother died when you was a tiny little babe. You see, I was your father's second wife; in fact, you weren't a year old when we married. Ed made me promise never to let you know. We were to bring you up just the same as if you was a child to both of us. Nobody knows but Reddy. I told him the day we started up here."

The girl's mind ran swiftly over the past as she listened. The truth of the revelation reached her instantly, explaining a hundred strange things which had puzzled her all her life. The absence of deep affection between

herself and Lize was explained. Their difference in habit, temperament, thought—all became plain. "But my mother!" she said, at last. "Who *was* my mother?"

"I never saw her. You see, Ed came into the country bringing you, a little motherless babe. He always said your mother was a fine woman, but I never so much as saw a picture of her. She was an educated woman, he said—a Southern woman—and her name was Virginia, but that's about all I can tell you of her. Now, I am going to let Ross know all of this as soon as I can. It will make a whole lot of difference in what he thinks of you."

She uttered all this much as a man would have done, with steady voice and with bright eyes, but Lee Virginia could feel beneath her harsh inflections the deep emotion which vibrated there, and her heart went out toward the lonely woman in a new rush of tenderness. Now that she was released from the necessity of excusing her mother's faults—faults she could now ignore; now that she could look upon her as a loyal friend, she was moved to pity and to love, and, rising, she went to her and put her arm about her neck, and said: "This won't make any difference. I am going to stay with you and help you just the same."

The tears came to the old woman's eyes, and her voice broke as she replied: "I knew you would say that, Lee Virginia, but all the same I don't intend to have you do any such thing. You've got to cut loose from me altogether, because some fine chap is going to come along one of these days, and he won't want me even as a *step-*

mother-in-law. No, I have decided that you and me had better live apart. I'll get you a place to live up in Sulphur, where I can visit you now and again; but I guess I am elected to stay right here in the Fork. They don't like me, and I don't like them; but I have kind o' got used to their ways of looking at me sidewise; they don't matter as much as it would up there in the city."

Lee turned back wistfully toward the story of her mother. "Where did my mother meet my father? Do you know that?"

"No, I don't. It was a runaway match, Ed said. I never did know who her folks were—only I know they thought she was marrying the wrong man."

The girl sighed as her mind took in the significance of her mother's coming to this wild country, leaving all that she knew and loved behind. "Poor little mother. It must have been very hard for her."

"I am afraid she did have a hard time, for Ed admitted to me that he hadn't so much as a saddle when he landed in the State. He hadn't much when I met him first, but everybody liked him. He was one of the handsomest men that ever jumped a saddle. But he was close-mouthed. You never could get anything out of him that he didn't want to tell, and I was never able to discover what he had been doing in the southern part of the State."

As she pondered on her changed relationship to Lize, Lee's heart lightened. It *would* make a difference to Ross. It would make a difference to the Redfields. Traitorous as it seemed, it was a great relief—a joy—

to know that her own mother, her real mother, had been "nice." "She *must* have been nice or Lize would not have said so," she reasoned, recalling that her stepmother had admitted her feeling of jealousy.

At last Lize rose. "Well, now, dearie, I reckon we had better turn in. It is getting chilly and late."

As they were about to part at the door of the tent Virginia took Lize's face between her hands. "Goodnight, mother," she said, and kissed her, to show her that what she had said would not make any difference.

But Lize was not deceived. This unwonted caress made perfectly plain to her the relief which filled the girl's heart.

Lee Virginia was awakened some hours later by a roaring, crackling sound, and by the flare of a yellow light upon her tent. Peering out, she saw flames shooting up through the roof of the ranger's cabin, while beside it, wrapped in a blanket, calmly contemplating it, stood Cavanagh with folded arms. A little nearer to the bridge Redfield was sitting upon an upturned box.

With a cry of alarm she aroused her mother, and Lize, heavy-eyed, laggard with sleep, rose slowly and peered out at the scene with eyes of dull amazement. "Why don't they try to put it out?" she demanded, as she took in the import of the passive figures.

Dressing with tremulous haste, Lee stepped from the tent just in time to see Swenson come from behind the burning building and join the others in silent contempla-

tion of the scene. There was something uncanny in the calm inaction of the three strong men.

A dense fog hung low, enveloping the whole canon in a moist, heavy, sulphurous veil, through which the tongues of flame shot with a grandiose effect; but the three foresters, whose shadows expanded, contracted, and wavered grotesquely, remained motionless as carven figures of ebony. It was as if they were contemplating an absorbing drama, in whose enactment they had only the spectator's curious interest.

Slowly, wonderingly, the girl drew near and called to Cavanagh, who turned quickly, crying out: "Don't come too close, and don't be frightened. I set the place on fire myself. The poor old herder died last night, and is decently buried in the earth, and now we are burning the cabin and every thread it contains to prevent the spread of the plague. Hugh and Swenson have divided their garments with me, and this blanket which I wear is my only coat. All that I have is in that cabin now going up in smoke—my guns, pictures, everything."

"How could you do it?" she cried out, understanding what his sacrifice had been.

"I couldn't," he replied. "The Supervisor did it. They had to go. The cabin was saturated with poison; it had become to me a plague spot, and there was no other way to stamp it out. I should never have felt safe if I had carried out even so much as a letter."

Dumb and shivering with the chill of the morning, Lee Virginia drew nearer, ever nearer. "I am so sorry,"

she said, and yearned toward him, eager to comfort him, but he warningly motioned her away.

"Please don't come any nearer, for I dare not touch you."

"But you are not ill?" she cried out, with a note of apprehension in her voice.

He smiled in response to her question. "No, I feel nothing but weariness and a little depression. I can't help feeling somehow as if I were burning up a part of myself in that fire—the saddle I have ridden for years, my guns, ropes, spurs, everything relating to the forest, are gone, and with them my youth. I have been something of a careless freebooter myself, I fear; but that is all over with now." He looked her in the face with a sad and resolute glance. "The Forest Service made a man of me, taught me to regard the future. I never accepted responsibility till I became a ranger, and in thinking it all over I have decided to stay with it, as the boys say, 'till the spring rains.'"

"I am very glad of that," she said.

"Yes; Dalton thinks I can qualify for the position of Supervisor, and Redfield may offer me the supervision of this forest. If he does, I will accept it—if you will go with me and share the small home which the Supervisor's pay provides. Will you go?"

In the light of his burning cabin, and in the shadow of the great peaks, Lee Virginia could not fail of a certain largeness and dignity of mood. She neither blushed nor stammered, as she responded: "I will go anywhere in the world with you."

He could not touch so much as the hem of her garment, but his eyes embraced her, as he said: "God bless you for the faith you seem to have in me!"

Redfield's voice interrupted with hearty clamor. "And now, Miss Virginia, you go back and rustle some breakfast for us all. Swenson, bring the horses in and harness my team; I'm going to take these women down the canon. And, Ross, you'd better saddle up as soon as you feel rested and ride across the divide, and go into camp in that little old cabin by the dam above my house. You'll have to be sequestered for a few days, I reckon, till we see how you're coming out. I'll telephone over to the Fork and have the place made ready for you, and I'll have the doctor go up there to meet you and put you straight. If you're going to be sick we'll want you where we can look after you. Isn't that so, Lee Virginia?"

"Indeed it is," replied the girl, earnestly.

"But I'm not going to be sick," retorted Cavanagh. "I refuse to be sick."

"Quite right," replied Redfield; "but all the same we want you where we can get at you, and where medical aid of the right sort is accessible. I'm going to fetch my bed over here and put you into it. You need rest."

Lee still lingered after Redfield left them. "Please do as Mr. Redfield tells you," she pleaded, "for I shall be very anxious till you get safely down the mountains. If that poor old man has any relatives they ought to be

told how kind you have been. You could not have been kinder to one of your own people."

These words from her had a poignancy of meaning which made his reply difficult. His tone was designedly light as he retorted: "I would be a fraud if I stood here listening to your praise without saying—without confessing—how deadly weary I got of the whole business. It was simply that there was nothing else to do. I had to go on."

Her mind still dwelt on the tragic event. "I wish he could have had some kind of a service. It seems sort of barbarous to bury him without any one to say a prayer over him. But I suppose that was impossible. Surely some one ought to mark his grave, for some of his people may come and want to know where he lies."

He led her thoughts to pleasanter paths. "I am glad you are going with the Supervisor. You *are* going, are you not?"

"Yes, for a few days, till I'm sure you're safe."

"I shall be tempted to pretend being sick just to keep you near me," he was saying, when Redfield returned, bringing his sleeping-couch. Unrolling this under a tree beside the creek, the Supervisor said: "Now, get into that."

Cavanagh resigned Lee with a smile. "Good-night," he said. "Oh, but it's good to remember that I shall see you to-morrow!"

With a happy glance and a low "Good-bye" she turned away.

Laying aside his blanket and his shoes, Cavanagh crept into the snug little camp-bed. "Ah," he breathed, with

a delicious sense of relief, "I feel as if I could sleep a week!" And in an instant his eyes closed in slumber so profound that it was barren even of dreams.

When he awoke it was noon, and Swenson, the guard, was standing over him. "I'm sorry, but it's time to be moving," he said; "it's a long ride over there."

"What time is it?" inquired Cavanagh, with some bewilderment.

"Nearly noon. I've got some coffee ready. Want some?"

"Do I? Just watch me!" And he scrambled out of his bed with vigor, and stretched himself like a cat, exclaiming: "Wow! but it does feel good to know that I am out of jail!"

Going down to the stream, he splashed his face and neck in the clear cold water, and the brisk rubbing which followed seemed to clear his thought as well as sharpen his appetite.

"You seem all right so far," hazarded the guide.

"I am all right, and I'll be all right to-morrow, if that's what you mean," replied Cavanagh. "Well, now, pack up, and we'll pull out."

For a few moments after he mounted his horse Cavanagh looked about the place as if for the last time—now up at the hill, now down at the meadow, and last of all at the stream. "I hope you'll enjoy this station as much as I have, Swenson. It's one of the prettiest on the whole forest."

Together they zigzagged up the side of the hill to the north, and then with Cavanagh in the lead (followed by

his pack-horse), they set up the long lateral moraine which led by a wide circle through the wooded park toward the pass. The weather was clear and cold. The wind bit, and Cavanagh, scantily clothed as he was, drew his robe close about his neck, saying: "I know now how it feels to be a blanket Indian. I must say I prefer an overcoat."

A little later the keen eyes of the guard, sweeping the mountain-side, were suddenly arrested. "There's a bunch of cowboys coming over the pass!" he called.

"I see them," responded Cavanagh. "Get out your glasses and tell me who they are."

Swenson unslung his field-glasses and studied the party attentively. "Looks like Van Horne's sorrel in the lead, and that bald-face bay just behind looks like the one Gregg rides. The other two I don't seem to know."

"Perhaps it's the sheriff after me for harboring Edwards," suggested Cavanagh.

But Swenson remained sober. He did not see the humor of the remark. "What are they doing on the forest, anyhow?" he asked.

Half an hour later the two parties came face to face on a little stretch of prairie in the midst of the wooded valley. There were four in the sheriff's party: Gregg, the deputy, and a big man who was a stranger to Cavanagh. Their horses were all tired, and the big civilian looked saddle-weary.

"Good evenin', gentlemen!" called the sheriff, in Southern fashion, as he drew near.

"Good evenin', Mr. Sheriff," Cavanagh civilly

answered. "What's the meaning of this invasion of my forest?"

The sheriff, for answer, presented the big stranger. "Mr. Cavanagh, this is Mr. Simpson, the county attorney."

Cavanagh nodded to the attorney. "I've heard of Mr. Simpson," he said.

Simpson answered the question Ross had asked. "We were on our way to your station, Mr. Cavanagh, because we understand that this old man Dunn who shot himself had visited you before his death, giving you information concerning the killing of the Mexican sheep-herders. Is that true?"

"It is."

"When did he visit you?"

"Two days ago, or maybe three. I am a little mixed about it. You see, I have been pretty closely confined to my shack for a few days."

Gregg threw in a query. "How *is* the old man?"

"He's all right; that is to say, he's dead. Died last night."

The sheriff looked at Simpson meaningly. "Well, I reckon that settles his score, judge. Even if he was implicated, he's out of it now."

"He couldn't have been implicated," declared the ranger, "for he was with me at the time the murder was committed. I left him high on the mountain in the Basque herder's camp. I can prove an alibi for him. Furthermore, he had no motive for such work."

"What did Dunn tell you?" demanded the sheriff. "What names did he give you?"

"Wait a moment," replied Cavanagh, who felt himself to be on his own territory, and not to be hurried. "There's a reward offered for the arrest of these men, is there not?"

"There is," replied the attorney.

"Well, before I make my statement I'd like to request that my share of the reward, if there is any coming to me, shall be paid over to the widow of the man who gave me the information. Poor chap, he sacrificed himself for the good of the State, and his family should be spared all the suffering possible."

"Quite right, Mr. Cavanagh. You may consider that request granted. Now for the facts."

"Before going into that, Mr. Attorney, I'd like to speak to you alone."

"Very well, sir," replied the attorney. Then waving his hand toward the others, he said: "Boys, just ride off a little piece, will you?"

When they were alone, Cavanagh remarked: "I don't think it wise to give these names to the wind, for if we do, there will be more fugitives."

"I see your point," Simpson agreed.

Thereupon, rapidly and concisely, the ranger reported what Dunn had said, and the attorney listened thoughtfully without speaking to the end; then he added: "That tallies with what we have got from Ballard."

"Was Ballard in it?" asked Cavanagh.

"Yes, we forced a confession from him."

"If he was in it, it was merely for the pay. He represented some one else."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because he was crazy to return to the show with which he used to perform, and desperately in need of money. Have you thought that Gregg might have had a hand in this affair? Dunn said he had, although he was not present at any of the meetings."

This seemed to surprise the attorney very much. "But he's a sheepman!" he exclaimed.

"I know he is; but he's also a silent partner in the Triangle cattle outfit, and is making us a lot of trouble. And, besides, he had it in for these dagoes, as he calls them, because they were sheeping territory which he wanted himself."

"I don't think he's any too good for it," responded Simpson, "but I doubt if he had any hand in the killing; he's too cunning and too cowardly. But I'll keep in mind what you have said, and if he is involved in any degree, he'll have to go down the road with the others—his money can't save him."

As they came back to the party Cavanagh thought he detected in Gregg's eyes a shifting light that was not there before, but he made no further attempt to impress his opinion upon the attorney or the sheriff. He only said: "Well, now, gentlemen, I must go on over the divide. I have an appointment with the doctor over there; also with a bed and a warmer suit of clothes than I have on. If I can be of any service to you when I am out of quarantine, I hope you will call upon me."

"It is possible that we may need you in order to locate some of the men whose names you have given me."

"Very good," replied Cavanagh. "If they come upon the forest anywhere, the Supervisor and I will find them for you."

So they parted, and Cavanagh and his guard resumed their slow journey across the range.

CONCLUSION

In her career as the wife of a Western rancher Eleanor Redfield had been called upon to entertain many strange guests, and she made no very determined objection when her husband telephoned that he was bringing Lize as well as Lee Virginia to stay at Elk Lodge for a few days. The revelation of the true relation between the two women had (as Lize put it) made a "whole lot of difference" to Mrs. Redfield. It naturally cleared the daughter of some part of her handicap, and it had also made the mother's attitude less objectionable.

Furthermore, the loyalty of Eliza to Ross, her bravery in defending him from attack, and the love and courage which enabled her to rise from a sick-bed and go to the mountains, ready and insistent on taking his place as nurse—all these were not the traits of a commonplace personality. "I begin to think I've been unjust to Mrs. Wetherford," she admitted to her husband.

She had seen Lize but once, and that was in the distorting atmosphere of the restaurant, and she remembered her only as a lumpy, scowling, loud-voiced creature with blowsy hair and a watchful eye. She was profoundly surprised, therefore, when Lee Virginia introduced a quiet-spoken, rather sad-faced elderly woman as her mother.

"I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Wetherford," Eleanor said, with the courtesy which was instinctive with her.

"I'm mightily obliged for the chance to come," replied Lize. "I told Reddy—I mean the Supervisor—that you didn't want no old-timer like me, but he said 'Come along,' and Lee she fixed me out, and here I am." She uttered this with a touch of her well-known self-depreciation, but she was by no interpretation sordid or common.

She did, indeed, show Lee's care, and her manner, while manifestly formed upon Lee's instructions, was never ludicrous. She was frankly curious about the house and its pretty things, and swore softly in her surprise and pleasure. "Think of an old cow-boss like me living up to these jimmy-cracks!" As they went to their room together, she made a confession: "The thing that scares me worst is *eating*. I've et at the Alma times enough, but to handle a fork here with El'nor Redfield lookin' on! Great peter! ain't there some way of takin' my meals out in the barn? I wouldn't mind you and Ross and Reddy —it's the missis."

Ross had not yet arrived at the cabin, but Redfield had warned Lee not to expect him till after dark. "He probably slept late, and, besides, there are always delays on the trail. But don't worry. Swenson will ride to the top of the divide with him, and if it seems necessary will come all the way."

This feeling of anxiety helped to steady Lize, and she got through the meal very well. She was unwontedly silent, and a little sad as well as constrained. She could

see that Lee fitted in with these surroundings, that she was at home with shining silver and dainty dishes, and she said to herself: "I could have been something like her if I'd had any sort o' raisin', but it's too late now. But oh, Lord! wouldn't Ed like to see her now!"

It was not yet dark when they came out on the veranda to meet the doctor, who had come to meet Ross, and Lee's anxiety led her to say: "Can't we go up to the cabin and wait for him there?"

"I was about to propose that," replied Redfield. "Shall we walk?"

Lee was instant in her desire to be off, but Lize said: "I never was much on foot and now I'm hoof-bound. You go along, and I'll sit on the porch here and watch."

So Lee, the doctor, and Redfield went off together across the meadow toward the little cabin which had been built for the workmen while putting in the dam. It was hardly a mile away, and yet it stood at the mouth of a mighty gorge, out of which the water sprang white with speed.

But Lee had no mind for the scenery, though her eyes were lifted to the meadow's wall, down which the ranger was expected to ride. It looked frightfully steep, and whenever she thought of him descending that trail, worn and perhaps ill, her heart ached with anxiety. But Redfield rambled on comfortably, explaining the situation to the doctor, who, being a most unimaginative person, appeared to take it all as a matter of course.

At the cabin itself Lee transferred her interest to the supper which had been prepared for the ranger, and she

went about the room trying to make it a little more comfortable for him. It was a bare little place, hardly more than a camp (as was proper), and she devoutly prayed that he was not to be sick therein, for it stood in a cold and gloomy place, close under the shadow of a great wall of rock.

As it grew dark she lighted a lamp and placed it outside the window in order that its light might catch the ranger's eye, and this indeed it did, for almost instantly a pistol-shot echoed from the hillside, far above, signalling his approach.

"There he is!" she exclaimed, in swift rebound to ecstasy. "Hear him shout?"

His voice could indeed be heard, though faintly, and so they waited while the darkness deepened and the voice of the stream rose like an exhalation, increasing in violence as the night fell.

At last they could hear the sound of his horse's feet upon the rocks, and with girlish impulse Lee raised a musical cry—an invitation as well as a joyous signal.

To this the ranger made vocal answer, and they could soon see him moving athwart the hillsides, zigzagging in the trailer's fashion, dropping down with incredible swiftness. He was alone, and leading his horse, but his celerity of movement and the tones of his voice denoted confidence and health.

The doctor laughed as he said: "I don't think a very sick man could come down a mountain like that."

"Oh, he isn't sick yet," said Redfield. "What we are afraid of is a possible development."

The ranger, as he came rushing down the final slope, found his knees weakened as much by excitement as by weariness. To hear Lee's clear voice down there, to know that she was waiting for him, was to feel himself the luckiest of men. Escaping contagion and being on his way to a larger position were as nothing compared to the lure of that girlish halloo. He saw the lamp shine afar, but he could not distinguish the girl's form till he emerged from the clump of pine-trees which hid the bottom of the trail. Then they all shouted together, and Redfield, turning to Lee, warningly said:

"Now, my dear girl, you and I must not interfere with the doctor. We will start back to the house at once."

"Not yet—not till we've seen him and talked with him," she pleaded.

"I don't think there's a particle of danger," said the doctor, "but perhaps you'd better not wait."

Cavanagh came up with shining eyes and heavy breath. "I made it—but oh, I'm tired! I never was tired like this before in my life." He looked at her as he spoke. "But I'm feeling fine."

"This is Doctor French, Ross."

"How are you doctor? I'm not shaking hands these days."

"We'll see about that," replied the physician.

"I met the sheriff on the way, Mr. Supervisor, and I gave him the story Dunn told me, and I made a request that the reward for the information be paid to Dunn's widow."

"I'll see to that," responded Redfield. "And now we'll leave you to the tender mercies of the doctor."

"I made some coffee for you, and you'll find some supper under a napkin on the table," explained Lee.

"Thank you."

"I'm sorry it isn't better. It's only cold chicken and sandwiches—"

"Only cold chicken!" he laughed. "My chief anxiety is lest it should not prove a whole chicken. I'm hungry as a coyote!"

"Well, now, good-night," said Redfield. "Doctor, you'll report as you go by?"

"Yes; expect me in half an hour or so."

And so Lee walked away with Redfield, almost entirely relieved of her care. "He can't be ill, can he?" she asked.

"I don't see how he can. His life has made him as clean and strong as an oak-tree on a windy slope. He is all right, and very happy. Your being there to meet him was very sweet to him, I could see that. If it should turn out that you should be the one to keep him here and in the Forest Service I shall be very grateful to you."

She did not reply to this, but walked along in silence by his side, feeling very small, very humble, but very content.

Lize was on the veranda. "Did he get through?"

"He's all right so far," returned Redfield, cheerily. "We left the doctor about to fly at him. We'll have a report soon."

They had hardly finished telling of how the ranger had descended the hill when the doctor arrived. "He hasn't a trace of it," was his report. "All he needs is

sleep. I cut him off from his entire over-the-range outfit, and there's no reason why he should not come down to breakfast with you in the morning."

Mrs. Redfield thanked the doctor as fervently as if he had conferred a personal favor upon her, and the girl echoed her grateful words.

"Oh, that's all right," the doctor replied, in true Western fashion; "I'll do as much more for you any time." And he rode away, leaving at least one person too happy to sleep.

The same person was on the veranda next morning when Cavanagh, dressed in the Supervisor's best suit of gray cassimere, came striding across the lawn—too impatient of the winding drive to follow it. As he came, his face glowing with recovered health, Lee thought him the god of the morning, and went to meet him unashamed, and he took her to his arms and kissed her quite as he had promised himself to do.

"Now I *know* that I am delivered!" he exclaimed, and together they entered upon the building of a home in the New West.

THE END

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